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Gender and security:

Afghan rural women's participation in local conflict resolution

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Acknowledgements

Abstract

Afghan women have traditionally been excluded from the public sphere, but have recently emerged as a political and social force, as their participation in civic and political arenas is increasing. Most importantly, their participation is crucial for further development of the country and achieving stability in national security. However, women still face vast challenges, in the form of violence, security threats, lack of education and employment opportunities, which are limiting their opportunities in life.

"Gender and security: Afghan rural women's participation in local conflict resolution" investigates the main security challenges facing rural women, as well as their opportunities for participation, based on interviews in Faryab, Badakhshan, Ghazni and Kabul. The research is further supported by secondary sources and a desk review. Through a discussion of security challenges identified through a human security perspective, the thesis shows how these threats are severe obstacles, limiting women from participating in community life and pursuing their ambitions. Violence, oppression, lack of education and employment opportunities, and limited access to legal protection are highly critical threats facing many Afghan rural women on a daily basis. The concept of gender, contextualized and rooted in Afghan culture, is essential for understanding how women experience insecurity and how it affects their lives.

List of acronyms

AMICS	Afghanistan Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey
APPRO	Afghanistan Public Policy Research Organization
AREU	Afghanistan Research and Evaluations Unit
AWN	Afghan Women's Network
CDC	Community development councils
CEDAW	Convention of Elimination of Discrimination Against Women
CHS	Commission on Human Security
CSO	Central Statistics Organization
DDA	District development assemblies
DOWA	Department of Women's Affairs
DRA	Democratic Republic of Afghanistan
EVAW	Elimination of Violence Against Women
EQUIP	Education Quality Improvement Program
IR	International Relations
ISK	Islamic State of Khorasan
MoE	Ministry of Education
MoWA	Ministry of Women's Affairs
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organisation
NAC	Norwegian Afghanistan Committee
NAPWA	National Action Plan for the Women of Afghanistan
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
NRC	Norwegian Refugee Council
NSP	National Solidarity Program
OHCHR	Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights
PDPA	People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan
PTRO	Peace Training and Research Organization
RRERS	Regional Rural Economic Regeneration Strategies
UNAMA	United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan
UNDP	United National Development Programme
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNSC	United Nations Security Council

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Chapter One

1.   Introduction

Women in Afghanistan have traditionally been excluded from the public sphere. Under the Taliban regime between 1996 and 2001, women endured harsh conditions and were deprived of their basic rights. Girls' school attendance was close to zero and women's participation in politics was non-existent. Afghanistan was left with a generational gap, where women lack the necessary skills to promote their needs and influence politics (PTRO 2014). In the past 15 years, however, women have gradually emerged as a social, political and economic force. Despite recent progress, women still face security challenges, including threats of violence, lack of economic and political empowerment, illiteracy and lack of equal rights, limiting their abilities to participate in the social, economic and political life. These security challenges are all threats to the human security in the country.

Afghanistan is one of the most dangerous and difficult countries in the world for women. Many Afghan women's lives are affected by gender-based violence, insecure environments and a lack of legal protection. While Afghan women and girls have made significant progress since 2001 in the political and social spheres, insecurity, harmful traditional practices and a lack of economic and educational opportunities are still limiting their progress (Calfas 2015; Ganesh 2013). United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) and the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) (2009) recognize the increased representation of Afghan women in the workplace, including within Afghan Ministries, Parliament and civil society, and Afghan women's significant contribution to the economic and social development of the country.

As women make up the majority of the population, economic growth, development and reconciliation will be hard to achieve without the support of women. Women still play a minor role in politics and face challenges in playing a substantive and influential role in decision-making and conflict resolutions. UNAMA and OHCHR (2009) notice how Afghan women are continually confronted by enormous challenges that exclude them from political processes vital for peace and security. This applies particularly to rural areas. Additionally, the escalation in conflict continues to take a heavy toll on Afghan civilians. The continued prevalence of

violence against women and harmful practices stemming from pervasive discrimination continue to be of serious concern (Calfas 2015), and domestic violence is on the rise (Latifi 2013). In 2015 increased incidents of targeting, threats and intimidation of women in public life was observed across the country, particularly those outspoken activists promoting women's rights.

National gender equality and gender mainstreaming policies are facing slow implementation. This is much due to top-down initiatives and Euro-centric approaches, lacking contextualisation. Afghanistan's social structure is based on patriarchal traditions, and society is characterized by male domination. Gender is thus a concept crucial to understand the realities for women in Afghanistan. In the Afghan context it is thus important to analyse the concept of gender in relation to other factors such as culture, ethnicity and socio-economic status.

1.1 Purpose and objectives

The purpose of the thesis is to contribute to a better understanding of Afghan rural women's challenges and opportunities for participation in local conflict resolution. The main objective is therefore to identify the security challenges women face and how it affects their lives and their ability to participate in local decision-making and conflict resolution, as well as to identify women's opportunities for participation. The objective is formulated based on a perceived lack of research on the local realities.

The focus will be on identifying the main conflict areas in the local community and how women are involved in solving them. In order to do so, the thesis will need to identify the role and level of women's participation and the degree to which they feel they are contributing. The research is based on a literature review, qualitative interviews with women from Badakhshan, Faryab, Ghazni and Kabul provinces, and a key informant interview. Grounded in feminist and human security theories, the thesis will seek to meet the objectives by answering the following research questions:

1 What has been the main approaches to studying gender and security in Afghanistan?
2 What are the main security challenges affecting women's ability to participate?
3 What are the most important conflicts in the local community?
4 How are women participating in local conflict resolution?

1.2 Structure

The next chapter will provide a contextual background for Afghanistan and the developments for women, followed by chapter three which introduces the theoretical framework of human security and feminist theory, as well as clarifies the key concepts gender, masculinity and patriarchy. Chapter four will describe the use of research methods in data collection and analysis, before chapter five presents the findings from interviews with Afghan women and with key informants in Kabul. The findings will be followed by a discussion of the research questions in light of the findings, theoretical framework and previous research on the topic in chapter six, before reaching a conclusion.

Chapter two

2. Background

It is hard to talk about peace in a country like Afghanistan, where there has been conflict for more than four decades. A large part of the population has never experienced a time of peace. In the past 15 years, the international community has had a great focus on developing and reconstructing Afghanistan. With help from the international community, considerable effort has been put into enhanced development; equal access to education, building schools, empowering women, and national reconciliation. However, security has not been keeping pace with development initiatives (Bernard 2008). Especially for women, the insecurity is a limit for their participation in public life.

Throughout Afghan history there have been several attempts at increasing women's status and role in society. King Amanullah launched a reform program in the 1920s where he wanted to improve the position of women. He sought to make education mandatory for boys and girls, by opening schools, and opening for exchange programs abroad. He also challenged the practices of child marriage, forced marriage, and polygamy, making Afghanistan one of the most progressive countries on these issues in the Muslim world. However, the reforms were not well received by traditionalists and the Islamic clergy, who saw it as a violation of traditional norms. King Amanullah was perhaps too progressive in his approach, and was overthrown by the strong resistance of the more the conservative population (Moghadam 2002).

The People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA) seized power in 1978 after a bloody coup, and established the Democratic Republic of Afghanistan (DRA) (Barfield 2009). Through a reform program they sought to change political and social structures, where revolutionary change, state building and women's rights went hand in hand (Moghadam 2002). The movement had certain parallels to King Amanullah's attempted reforms, for instance the PDPA also sought to institute compulsory education for all citizens. However, again it was opposed by traditionalists and those eager to maintain control over the female population. These opponents were deeply against modernization, secularization and promotion of equal rights from the central government. Internal struggle within the party as well as armed opposition quickly led to a civil war (Moghadam 2002). In 1979 Soviet troops intervened, and the civil

war became internationalized, with Soviet support for DRA, and the USA, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Iran, and China supporting and funding the opposing mujahidin.

During the Soviet occupation in the 1980s women's access to public space increased, especially in Kabul (Moghadam 2002). However, in areas were the mujahidin were in control, women's reality was very different. Moghadam (2002) notices how unlike other liberation or resistance movements in the world, the Afghan Mujahidin never encouraged women to be active participants. It is noteworthy that they did not have any women spokespersons. The Soviet troops withdrew in 1989, and the PDPA were still in power until it dissolved itself in 1992 (Barfield 2009). With the power vacuum that followed the end of the war against the Soviet Union, Afghanistan experienced turbulent times. In the end, the Taliban seized power and introduced a strongly gender-segregated regime. They opposed education and employment for girls and women, and introduced compulsory, heavy veiling for women. Women were no longer permitted to work, and education was now mostly for men (Moghadam 2002). Women who did not conform to the rules imposed by the Taliban would be severely punished by public beating. Under this particularly harsh gender regime, only a few determined women were involved in education and work, as it was a serious risk not just to themselves, but to their families.

The time after 9/11 became a new chapter for Afghanistan. Security has become a contested concept during the US-led occupation. The US used a certain narrative in order to justify the war and invasion of Afghanistan in 2001. This would ensure voters, even those who had never even heard of Afghanistan. This particular narrative was "forging a link between geopolitics of counterterrorism and the liberation of benighted women…" (Enloe 2004, p. 280). The US invaded Afghanistan at a time when the state did no longer function. It was therefore necessary to create a new state in order to achieve stability in the country (Barfield 2009). In establishing a new state, the centralized government was restored. However, the economic development and stable secure environment it aspired to achieve has proved challenging. Taliban insurgency resurfaced in 2006, taking advantage of people's mistrust and disapproval of the government. At the end of the first decade of the twenty-first century, Afghanistan was again at a tipping point (Barfield 2009). The Obama administration put Afghanistan back on the foreign policy agenda in 2009, with highest priority.

Since 2014, USA and NATO troops are withdrawing. Afghanistan now finds itself in a critical time of transition, both economically and politically, but also in security (Kakar 2014).

Responsibility for national security is being handed over to Afghan security forces. Currently, Afghanistan is experiencing increasing insecurity as Taliban is gaining more grounds. Islamic State of Khorasan (ISK) is posing a more recent threat, and has made its entry by several terror attacks, particularly against the Shia population (Gunaratna 2016), further adding to the insecurity in the country. With 42% of the population living in absolute poverty (UNAMA & OHCHR 2009), there are serious insecurities regarding food, economy and health. Due to continuing insecurity, oppressing social and economic structures, many do not get access to education, information and formal skills, which again creates a lack of empowerment, leading to unemployment and further economical challenges. This social insecurity works as a recruitment tool, as the Taliban claims to offer protection and prosperity in a time of poverty and low economic development.

2.1 State structure and political environment

Afghanistan's population is mostly rural, with 80 % of the population living outside the regional and provincial centres (Beath et al. 2015). Poverty is high, and Afghanistan is ranked among the bottom 20 countries in the Human Development Index (UNDP 2015). The central government has generally been weak in providing governance and services throughout the rural communities. Therefore, local communities have typically established their own institutions for local governance (Beath et al. 2015). Men have traditionally had a leading role in conflicts, both in war strategies and peace negotiations. Even though women are often those who suffer the most from war and conflict, they are not well represented in either planning, negotiations nor agreements. The political sphere in Afghanistan is characterised by patronage networks, which traditionally only includes men, leaning on each other for political and financial protection (Sharan & Wimpelmann 2014).

The structure of the Afghan government is often described as one of the most centralized models in the world (Semple 2012). This is due to the concentration of power in the presidency. The model is based on the 2004 constitution, which also provides for advisory provincial councils and elected bodies at district level. The government is organized at three levels where the central government includes the presidency, the ministries and the national parliament. The 34 provinces have their own elected advisory councils. These provinces are sub-divided into districts, which include approximately 217 municipalities and 40,020 villages (Shurkin 2011). Even though the constitution provides for elected bodies at district level, provincial councils

constitute the only elected body of the state at the subnational level (Shurkin 2011). Further, these provincial councils are often seen as unrepresentative and thus lack credibility among the Afghan population.

At the community and district levels there are Community Development Councils (CDCs) and the District Development Assemblies (DDAs). CDCs are run by the Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development as a part of the World Bank-funded National Solidarity Program (NSP). They are elected directly in rural communities to engage in small-scale development projects (Shurkin 2011). This bottom-up approach to development empowers local communities to both select and manage the development projects that best address their local priorities (Beath et al. 2015). CDCs are elected through a secret-ballot, universal suffrage, centred on democratic process and women's participation, in order to achieve gender-balance. The DDAs consists primarily of CDC chairs (and elders from districts without CDCs). The DDAs main purpose is to coordinate the efforts of CDCs. The CDCs were monitored through the National Solidarity Program, and received funding for their development projects. NSP had two main pillars, one of which was establishing gender-balanced CDCs for achieving community development. According to a feature story by the World Bank (2015) CDCs are found in approximately 85% of Afghan communities. The 35,000 CDCs established by the NSP have been important tools in implementing 80,000 development projects in the respective communities, which has created economic prosperity in the villages (World Bank 2015). However, the program ended in 2015, which naturally has had impact on development and advancement in the CDCs with lack of funding and decreasing capacities. The follow-up program, Citizen Charter, was launched Autumn 2016 and president Ghani has previously expressed that this upcoming program will continue the good work of the CDCs, making CDCs the only competent government bodies in villages (World Bank 2015). However, in terms of access to justice, many Afghans still rely on the traditional justice systems, especially in rural areas.

Traditional institutions usually involve the household or family, and the local community councils (NRC 2014). Studies have indicated that many Afghans prefer turning to informal bodies such as the jirga and shura of local elders to resolve disputes. The shura is an informal body for decision-making at the local level, which main task is to uphold norms, rules and practices (Wakefield & Bauer 2005). The jirga has traditionally been an open forum for discussion at the village level. Both the jirga and shura play important roles in providing justice

outside the urban areas. As these institutions are usually made up of male elders and landowners, women are often excluded from having any influence. Ongoing dominance of local institutions by traditional power holders is thus a constraint for women's participation. These institutions exist alongside the government bodies and are preferred by many. In some areas traditional institutions are the only available choice of justice. The traditional institutions seek to promote more of a collective community harmony rather than the individuals' own rights.

2.2 Women's Participation

Women's participation is key for implementing development projects and resolving conflicts in a better way. As women can have an important role in a country's peace talks and conflict resolution (UNSC 2000), women's support is needed in order to lead Afghanistan forward. They are needed not just as voters, but as actors, which will enhance stabilization in the security transition (Calfas 2015). For example, more gender-balanced security forces are not only more representative for the population, it might also be crucial in managing reports of violence against women. Women should not only be a source of disputes; they should also have a place at the table in solving them. With a good constitution, and a committed president and first lady, Afghanistan is already moving in the right direction. The 2004 constitution introduced a quota system to guarantee a minimum level of female participation, both at national and provincial level. There is now a quota guaranteeing women 27% of the seats in parliament, as well as 20% in the provincial councils (Calfas 2015; Sharan & Wimpelmann 2014). In 2015 there were approximately 1400 women in Afghan National Police, which makes up only 1 % (Calfas 2015). There are even fewer women in the army, or in the judicial system. The Afghan Women's Network (AWN) (2016) reports that there are only 2% women in the security sector and 9% participating in peace processes. Furthermore, increasing women's representation at the local level is also a challenging task.

Women's inclusion in decision-making both at the central and provincial level has increased considerably in the past 15 years (AWN 2016). Women's civic engagement reached a top in the 2014 elections, with a 37,6 % female votes, and as many as 300 female candidates running for provincial council seats (Calfas 2015). Women are present in ministries, in the Parliament and in provincial councils. Girls' and women's access to education increased drastically after 2001 and has helped women find suitable jobs in government and civil society. Further, women are increasingly present at local level through institutions such as Community Development

Councils (CDCs) and District Development Assemblies (DDAs). In the CDCs half of the seats are allocated to women, giving women opportunities to take part in decision-making at community level and promote their opinions (World Bank 2016). CDCs have enabled women to play a greater role in local governance, and can help channelling women's voices to the government. CDCs have increased education for girls as well as giving women high self-confidence (World Bank 2015). At the Fifth National Consultative Conference of Community Development Councils, more than 30% of the participants were women. Some women expressed that they play an almost equal role in local conflict resolution as men in many provinces (World Bank 2015).

In the 388 DDAs that have been established throughout the provinces, 31 % of the members are women (UNDP 2016). Like the CDCs, the DDAs are local governance initiatives, bringing the voices of local community members, including women, into community decision-making. However, there are still not enough female members to meet the quota to the CDCs, either because they cannot participate or are not willing to. Unfortunately, the ever present threats of violence and abuse is limiting women's voices and mobility. Further, the strong patriarchal attitude in several parts of the country lowers the presence of women in local decision-making.

Despite the progress in the past 15 years, the achievements look fragile (AWN 2016). Women still suffer from insecurity, discrimination and violence which affects their ability to participate in the public sphere. Women's presence in the political sphere is still low compared to men's, especially in rural areas. While women are present in the security sector, they have a lower level of participation than men, and do not take part in decisions and national strategies. Even though women are physically present in peace councils, they are often not engaged in relevant peace discussions. For example, there was not a single female representative at the post-conflict peace talk between the Afghan government and the Taliban in July 2015 (Priyali 2015).

2.3 Legal frameworks

Commitment to gender equality has been a huge part of the development of Afghanistan post-2001 (APPRO 2013). Afghanistan has adopted several national policies regarding the role and the rights of women. For instance, the Afghan government approved the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) in 2003. Following CEDAW, it was highlighted that many Afghan laws explicitly discriminated women. Thus, it

is hard to meet obligations within the CEDAW without first revising the existing Afghan legislation (Sharan & Wimpelmann 2014). Further, the Law on Elimination of Violence against women (EVAW) was adopted in 2009. It was particularly important as it made rape a crime distinct from adultery. Furthermore, it criminalized under age marriage (Sharan & Wimpelmann 2014). It is seen as an important step forward in the government's protection of female citizens. However, implementation has been slow. In June 2015 Afghanistan adopted a National Action Plan (2015-2022) which will implement the UN Security Council Resolution 1325. The resolution aims at protecting women and girls from threats of armed conflict, protect their human rights, eliminate violence against women and ensure women's equal participation in peace negotiations and reconstruction (UNSC 2000). The action plan will ensure the realization of constitutional rights for Afghan women, but it acknowledges the fact that bringing lasting change to the lives of Afghan women will be a tough challenge. It emphasizes gender mainstreaming, aiming at having women participate on all levels in society. Further, it gives special attention to protection, recognizing the various threats women are facing in a conflict or post-conflict society. It aims at protecting women from all kinds of violence and discrimination, and enhance women's participation in decision-making.

2.4 Ethnic and cultural diversity

Afghanistan is situated in the heart of Asia, bordering Iran to the west, Pakistan to the south, China to the far north-east, and Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan to the north. The country is varied in terms of geography, and has a vast cultural and ethnic diversity. The Afghan population is divided into several groups, both major and minor, many of which have not been well studied (Barfield 2010). Most important by population are the Pashtun, Tajik, Hazara, Uzbek, and Turkmen. The fact that they all reside in Afghanistan is a product of history. Throughout history, Afghanistan has been part of several empires, which has been essential for the ethnic and cultural composition of the country today. Just as important as knowing who the people are is also understanding how they live (Barfield 2010). Naturally, there are great variations in social conduct, traditional practise and levels of conservatism, which affects women's ability to participate in community life.

2.5 Gender relations

Afghanistan is situated in what has been referred to as the "patriarchal belt" (Moghadam 2002, p. 20). The central social unit is the patriarchal extended family, where the elder men have the

authority. A characteristic of patriarchal societies is the low level of female literacy and education, and participation in work-force and the economy in general. Living in a patriarchal society, Afghan men are expected to take the major responsibilities in the family as well as in the community. In this type of society, women are often subordinated, reduced to a form of property belonging to the male. The conception of women as property is maybe particularly visible among Pashtuns, as their code of conduct, the Pashtunwali, is very masculinist (Moghadam 2002). Women in the most conservative areas are under strict control, including ways to behave and dress, their role in the society and the family, which are all closely linked to the extended family's honour. In this system, women can first gain power later in life when they become mother-in-laws.

In the Afghan patriarchal social structure, the existence of a weak modern state might have implications for further development and advancement for women (Moghadam 2002). In December 2001, 200 women participated in the 1550 member Loya Jirga, which is a grand assembly made up of elders and community leaders from across the country, who come together in matters of high national importance. The Department of Women's Affairs was established, as well as other organizations, which together with the broader international community sought to develop gender equality policies, projects and programmes, supposedly to enhance women's participation in decision-making (Rostami-Povey 2007). However, little attention was given to the everyday insecurities outside the urban centres, which makes it harder to successfully implement policies and constitutional rights.

Gender relations have been affected and shaped by ethnic conflict, state formation, state-society relations and imperial domination. Gender is a process embedded in all social interaction and institutions: social relations, Islamic religion, culture, domination, subordination and masculinity. Gender relations are not set in stone, but have evolved in the context of social struggle (Rostami-Povey 2007). Ethnic groups are therefore crucial in the understanding of gender in Afghanistan.

Gender segregation makes up an important part of the community setting. However, it is important to notice that these communal identities and gender roles are constructs of social, economic and political changes, hence they are not static or absolute. In Afghanistan, the community and group identity dominates. Individual identity is often non-existent, especially in rural areas. The community identity naturally has great impact on the gender relations found

in society. Women see themselves as part of the bigger family, constructed of local culture and tradition (Rostami-Povey 2007). Marriage is a union not only between individuals but between two families. Thus, their needs and demands are not separated from that of their families. During the Taliban rule, and in Afghanistan today, women's lives are shaped by gender power relations. But one must not forget that Afghan women also know how to fight for their rights, and refuse to conform to gender identities, either imposed by the Taliban or by invading forces (Rostami-Povey 2007).

Chapter Three

3.   Theoretical framework

What constitutes security challenges for Afghan women? Does it regard physical violence, lack of access to food or minimal education? How does it affect their ability to participate in the local community? To answer these questions, it is necessary to develop an understanding of the concept of security applicable to the Afghan context. The thesis will argue that a broader understanding of security, in juxtaposition with a gender perspective, is necessary in order to investigate the main security threats for Afghan women. The thesis will therefore introduce human security theory and provide an overview of the feminist approach, but first seeking to clarify key concepts vital to this thesis, namely gender, masculinity and patriarchy. These concepts are all crucial for using gender as an analytical concept. The thesis will argue for a bottom-up approach to security, which emphasizes the understanding of the situation on the ground.

3.1 Gender

Historically the concept of gender was often used interchangeably with sex. It means that gender was thought of as natural categories, based on the biological differences between man and woman. Over the past decades, however, this has changed and gender is recognized as a concept distinct from sex, because gender does not refer to what men and women are biologically. Instead, gender refers to ideological and material relations between men and women (Steans 1998). Feminist theory gives attention to social differentiations based on sex or gender as they see gender as the "socially constructed distinctions between privileged masculine and devalorized feminine characteristics" (Peterson 2004, p. 2). Thus, masculine and feminine do not describe "natural" characteristics, but are instead gender terms.

Gender therefore refers to the socially and culturally constructed characteristics of women and men, and the relationship between them, and may vary across time and place. As a concept it can be useful in analysing causes, predicting outcomes, as well as shaping the way we think about solutions (Sjoberg 2009). Thus, gender is now used as an important analytical tool to understand politics. It is a necessary concept for breaking down gender hierarchies. Putting on "gender lenses" makes the everyday lives of women visible to us, and let us focus on the impact

of the inequalities they experience in society. As Jill Steans explains (1998, p 5), "To look at the world through gender lenses is to focus on gender as a particular kind of power relation, or to trace out the ways in which gender is central to understanding international processes."

Historically, the feminine has been seen as passive, emotional and sensitive, while the masculine has been the aggressive, objective and logical. These assumptions have been used to justify the subordination of women (Steans 1998). In every society there are certain sets of emotional or psychological characteristics associated with the masculine or the feminine. In the 1960s feminists started to challenge this notion of natural sex roles and argued that instead, sex roles are assigned by society, which favoured the male roles over the female (Steans 1998). Thus, it became apparent that men and women did not have equal status in society. Ideas about gender have therefore been used to justify social inequalities.

Peterson (2004) identifies the reconstruction of theory as one of three feminist knowledge projects. This reconstruction of theory emphasizes the distinction between sex and gender as crucial, namely because the latter is constructed. Gender is embedded in our language, thus influencing the way we conceptualize and communicate (Peterson 2004). Therefore, it requires a special attention to symbols, language and culture to be able to examine the constructions of power, security or violence. It is important to mention here that women experience gender in different ways. A generalization of the experience of gender would not be representative, as each individual experience gender in the context of their own culture, language and identity. In the Afghan context it is thus important to analyse the concept of gender in relation to other factors such as culture, ethnicity and socio-economic status.

3.2 Masculinity

Politics is often associated with masculine characteristics (Tickner 1992). Such characteristics include for example courage, power, and independence, but also physical strength. Masculine characteristics are valued the most in states' policies, as opposed to more feminine characteristics of emotionality, passivity and weakness. The use of violence is associated with masculinity and is often equated with military strength to defend a territory. Such conceptualization might result in a gender hierarchy. As security policies is often associated with masculinity, it puts a limit to what kind of behaviour is acceptable for a state. This might be a constraint to reach solutions, as reconciliation is often perceived as feminine and weak.

This way of understanding the concept of security thus further contributes to silence women's voices in policy making (Tickner 2014). Favour of masculinities is thus particularly common within patriarchal societies.

3.3 Patriarchy

Patriarchy is broadly understood as male power over the female. Patriarchy refers to both an ideology and the institutions of male rule and privilege, in contrast to female subordination (Staudt 2011). The patriarchy is a social construction, and constitutes clear rules and behaviours, which again makes up a reality. Enloe (2004, p. 4) sees patriarchy as "…the structural and ideological system that perpetuates the privileging of masculinity." Patriarchy exists within many societies in the world, and particularly in Muslim societies, where patriarchal ideology has been at the centre of political Islam (Badran 2013).

Patriarchal societies are known for marginalizing the feminine. They typically ignore or trivialize what is concerned feminine characteristics. However, no patriarchy is made up of exclusively male and the masculine. It further requires a clear idea about the feminine as well as it requires women's acceptance. Often, patriarchy has been so long-lasting and accommodating, that in fact, many women overlook their marginalized role. Instead they feel "secure, protected and valued" (Enloe 2004, p. 6). Patriarchy creates rules for women's behaviour and tells women something about what they can or cannot do, think, desire and prefer. The same goes for security narratives; patriarchy tells us how we should think about security, whose security matters, and how it is achieved (Hirschmann 1996).

Aoláin (2013) argues that patriarchy is not only found within traditional culture and norms. Indeed, it is also imported by international interveners. In establishing new legal and political institutions, the support of the international community is typically engaged. These international actors are often caught between different interests (Aoláin 2013). International interveners often fail to see their own patriarchy when getting involved in the conflicted area. This creates a hierarchy of which security threats to address and in what priority. The security of women is typically excluded from the agenda because it is not highly ranked in the hierarchy. Aoláin (2013) here identifies a structural problem; that some kinds of threats are perceived to be more serious than others. As a result, violence against women might not be counted for in the overall narrative of conflict and security.

3.4 Human security

Security is a contested concept. Most scientists would agree that security is the absence of threat. In its traditional understanding within International Relations (IR), security holds the state as the primary actor. However, security involves greater complexity than just looking at the traditional notions of defending state sovereignty and territory. Thus, for the past 20 years there has been a greater focus on the individual, as an alternative approach.

Human security is a broader concept. It unifies fields of policy and analysis that have traditionally been kept apart, namely humanitarianism and development, and international security. It takes a step away from the conventional state-centred concerns (Acharya 2014), towards an individual-based approach. The concept evolved after the end of the Cold War, at the end of a bipolar world order, when the world saw the rapid increase in new security threats. Threats that did not fit in with the relatively narrow confines of the traditional security paradigm. Human security became a response to these new threats. It is a concept that focuses on the individual and is therefore centred on security for people rather than states. As argued by Tadjbakhsh and Chenoy (2007, p. 13) the "…added value of the concept of human security lies in the new questions it poses as regards the problem of 'security'." The concept thus helps us answer questions of 'security of whom?' and 'security from what?' and 'security by what means?'

Human security can be seen as a combination of security, development and human rights. This overlap between security, development and rights is due to a common source, namely human dignity. Human security strives for people to be able to live their daily lives safely, in a safe environment. This includes as much having a job and participating in political processes, as living a healthy life. While security is not only a problem of physical threats, it further encompasses a lack of or restricted access to health facilities, education, political rights and legal protection, as well as social opportunities (Tadjbakhsh & Chenoy 2007). "The concept of insecurity has relative connotations in different contexts. For some, it can be insecurity in the sudden loss of access to jobs, health care or education, while for others it can be violation of human rights, domestic violence or displacement" (Tadjbakhsh & Chenoy 2007, p. 10). The focus on people´s security, both pure physical security and security regarding livelihood, is now encapsulated into the concept of human security. "To be meaningful, therefore, security needs

to be redefined as a subjective experience at the micro level in terms of people's experience" (Tadjbakhsh & Chenoy 2007, p. 10).

Thus, human security is a concept that applies to various contexts, whether political, military, humanitarian or developmental. For example, security for one Afghan woman might be to provide for her children daily, making sure they get food, health care and education, while for another Afghan woman insecurity might consist of the fear of suicide attacks or increased power to insurgents. The concept is often applied to post-conflict contexts. It is considered to "embody human rights and humanitarian concerns and to imply meeting the need for the protection of human worth, minimum physical safety, human rights and minimum standards of living" (Hasegawa 2007, p. 3). And while protection may be provided by states and other institutions, people must also be empowered to develop a resilience to difficult conditions.

According to conventional theories, state power and security would equal order and peace. Therefore, states should have the sole rights and means to protect its own citizens. However, there are states which fail to provide security, and some states are even a threat to their own population. By going beyond the traditional notions of security, which only goes as far as the state border, human security seeks to give the individual citizen a voice (Benedek 2008). Understood as a comprehensive concept encompassing more than the absence of violent conflict, the concept can be very far-reaching. In that way it may be helpful in broadening our understanding of peace and security, as well as guide our approach to the realization of human rights for all (Benedek 2008).

3.4.1 Defining human security

The human security concept was first created and shaped in the Human Development Report of 1994 (UNDP 1994). The concept is usually associated with the UN systems. The 1994 report introduces seven main categories within human security:

- Economic security: being assured basic income, and employment.
- Food security: physical and economic access to food.
- Health security: guaranteeing a minimum protection from disease and unhealthy lifestyles. Particularly vulnerable are women and children. One of the most serious issues is childbirth.
- Environmental security: protection from ravages of nature and threats such as water scarcity and air pollution.

- Personal security: protection from physical violence at all levels, whether it is from the state or from other individuals.
- Community security: ensures protection of people from loss of traditional relationships and identities, but also from harsh traditional practices
- Political security: ensures people's right to live in a society that honours their basic human rights, ensures freedom of individuals and groups from government attempts to exercise control over ideas and information.

It is worth mentioning, however, that there are links and overlaps between the categories, and a threat to one aspect of human security is likely to affect other aspects. Threats to human security are interconnected, and being mutually interlinked they might cause a domino effect. For example, health insecurity could lead to poverty, which again can result in lack of education (Tadjbakhsh & Chenoy 2007).

The Commission on Human Security (CHS) defines human security as follows:

> "To protect the vital core of all human lives in ways that enhance human freedoms and human fulfilment. Human security means protecting fundamental freedoms – freedoms that are the essence of life. It means protecting people from critical (severe) and pervasive (widespread) threats and situations. It means using processes that build on people's strengths and aspirations. It means creating political, social, environmental, economic, military and cultural systems that together give people the building blocks of survival, livelihood and dignity." (CHS 2003, p. 4)

However, what is considered to be vital and what freedoms are the essence of life might vary between societies and individuals, or across time and space. Thus, human security cannot be a static concept. For human security to be valuable it requires a dynamic character that can adapt to particular individuals and societies. From the CHS' definition it becomes evident that the concept encompasses far more than just security from violent conflict. If further includes complying with human rights and to give everyone access to education and health care, and an opportunity to achieve their ambitions in life. Human security is a complex concept, including several interrelated building blocks necessary to achieve both human, and thus national, security (CHS 2003).

Human security does not help us explain threats, instead it is an important asset in identifying new ones (Tadjbakhsh & Chenoy 2007). The human security framework helps identify both threats caused by individual actors, as well as overlying structural causes of insecurity.

3.4.2 Protect and empower

There are two important pillars of human security, namely to protect and to empower. Human security seeks to protect people from menaces, while at the same time empower people to be able to take care of themselves. Thus, the concept brings together human elements of security, of rights and of development (CHS 2003). The first key to human security is therefore the protection strategies, which means shielding people from menaces. In order to arrive at protection, people's rights and freedoms must be upheld. Human security identifies where protection is missing and provides ideas for how to improve it (CHS 2003). As human security is a dynamic concept, it is therefore important that people participate in formulating and implementing these protection strategies. The second key is the empowerment strategies, which enable people to develop their "resilience to difficult conditions" (CHS 2003, p. 10). This means giving the people ability to act on their own behalf. By empowering people, they get to develop their potential both as individual citizens and as communities. They become able to recognize when their rights and dignity as citizens are violated, and act upon that. Further, empowerment can create opportunities for work, help people address local conflicts and even mobilize for the security of others (CHS 2003). The prerequisite to empowerment is thus to provide education and information.

3.4.3 Human security and education

Human security emphasizes the importance of basic education, particularly for girls. Basic education is a fundamental human right and the capability to read and write improves the quality of life. Further, educational skills directly affect security, as illiteracy and innumeracy are themselves insecurities (CHS 2003). Education can be fundamental for health security, especially for girls, as the impact of an educated woman on her family's well-being is consistently strong worldwide. Education can also give freedom, by providing people with knowledge to promote their own human security as well as that of others. Lack of education and knowledge is a limiting factor to communication and might limit people's political voices, which results in more insecurity. Formal skills and knowledge will help people gaining confidence and be more proactive in society and political life. Educational deprivation is of

therefore of utmost concern, because without it people are "disadvantaged as productive workers, as fathers and mothers, as citizens capable of social change" (CHS 2003, p. 6).

Human security's promotion of the right to education is especially important whenever there is discrimination and lack of equality in access to education. It is thus important to keep focus on the individual as larger units might discriminate against some of its members. This applies especially to women, whom may be discriminated against both in the household and in the society as a whole (CHS 2003).

3.4.4 Human security and human rights

It is apparent that human security and human rights are interrelated and interdependent concepts (Benedek 2008). They are mutually reinforcing. While human security helps identifying which rights are being violated, human rights helps identifying ways of how to promote human security. Perhaps the most visible similarity between the two concepts is the political security aspect of human security, which includes the individual's freedom to exercise their basic human rights (Benedek 2008).

Human security is closely linked to human rights education. Receiving information on one's rights is a human right: the right to know one's rights (Benedek 2008). Giving people access to basic education must therefore be placed high on the human security agenda. Education will raise awareness about people's own rights, but also of the rights of others, which again will help promoting human security. The promotion of human rights, and in particular women's rights, should be an integral part of human security (Benedek 2008).

3.4.5 Limitations

Human security has been criticised for being too vague and thus not suitable as an analytical concept. As it does not give clear descriptions of responsibility, it has been criticized for neglecting the state as provider of security (Acharya 2014). When few have a very clear idea of what it means, it created difficulties of transforming it into actual policy initiatives. The concept is broad, and hard to distinguish, and there is little evidence of change on the ground (Tripp 2013). Owen (2008) has criticized human security for being too unclear about what it constitutes, what mechanisms one should use and lack of clear responsibility. Furthermore, there is a lack of clarity between human security and human rights, and a conceptual

overstretch, meaning the negative effects of including in human security all possible threats there are. The concept has also been criticized for being a way of imposing liberal Western values and political institutions in the South, and in that way justify interventions (Tadjbakhsh & Chenoy 2007).

Further, human security is criticized for lacking a gender perspective (Acharya 2014; Tripp 2011). Therefore, it can be fruitful to draw on feminist arguments in order to reach a more open and inclusive approach to human security.

3.4.6 Human security and gender

There is a considerable relationship between human security and gender. The relationship has multiple dimensions and the UN (1999) has identified five main aspects in this regard: 1. Violence against women and girls, 2. Gender inequalities in control over resources, 3. Gender inequalities in power and decision-making, 4. Women's human rights, 5. Women (and men) as actors, not victims. These aspects are all particularly relevant for Afghanistan. The aspects are closely tied together, meaning that one of the aspects seldom appears alone. Recent conflicts have shown how women become victims of rape and violence, both as a direct result of war and as an increase of domestic violence. Another important aspect is the role of women as actors in conflict. In recent years, inclusion of women in peacekeeping operations and conflict resolution has received increased focus. Especially feminists have argued for the importance of women's participation on the same level as men, and therefore why gender perspectives are crucial to security theory. As established above, security is not merely about defending the state from attacks from other states, it is also about protecting its citizens. Looking only to military power might not be a very useful way to look at national security, especially as large parts of the world's population are facing security issues in being able to meet their basic material needs (Tickner 1988). Protection of citizens includes not the least protecting women against violence, whether it may be from men they know or as part of a war strategy.

Human security can be an important tool in order to understand how gender and violence are related. There are several aspects linking security and gender, however, violence is a good starting point as violence appears in many human security contexts. Violence can further be part of the construction of gender by upholding patriarchal values. Aoláin (2013, p. 43) argues how security as a broad concept encompasses physical, social, economic, and sexual security,

and only when they are all combined in a way "that affirms relevance to gender," is gendered security achievable. Many aspects of human security are compatible with a feminist approach. A gender approach might be helpful for understanding human security and the policies resulting from it, through the focus on individual narratives and lived experience. The next section will give an overview of the feminist approach.

3.5 Feminist perspectives

Feminism is concerned about the inequalities between men and women, and what consequences it has for the individual, but also for national and international politics. Feminism entered IR in the late 1980s and seeks to challenge the mainstream approaches to international affairs and global politics. The approach grew out of the feminist movement in the West, fighting for political, social and economic equality for women. As mentioned above, with the end of the Cold War new issues arose and the concept of security expanded to embrace also human security (Tickner 2014). During this time period, more focus was given to social movements, international organizations and other non-state actors. Women's voices were rarely heard, nor visible in state power or military leadership, even though the decisions their leaders made would have profound impacts on their lives. Women's political activism can be found on several levels, from local and regional to national or transnational (Staudt 2011). As Enloe argues (1990), making feminist sense of international politics requires looking at women and their lives in places that are traditionally dismissed as irrelevant to IR.

Violence, war and peace are core concepts when talking about security. Feminists have for decades sought to challenge the conventional notions of these concepts, towards a more individual-based and gender-sensitive approach. A common starting point for feminist theorizing is J. Ann Tickner. In *Gender in International Relations* (1992) she argues for a need to examine power relations, as it shapes gendered hierarchies. Cynthia Enloe (1990) brought feminism to international politics by asking "where are the women?" She sees it as quite alarming that women remain inadequately present in (world) politics, and absent from the discipline of IR. And indeed, IR has been one of the last fields to slowly open up to feminism (Wibben 2011). Enloe argues that a focus on women's everyday experiences can create valuable insights to violence, war and peace. All that is needed according to Enloe (2004) is a feminist curiosity. The starting point for this curiosity is to take women's lives seriously; by

that meaning "…listening carefully, digging deep, developing a long attention span, being ready to be surprised" (Enloe 2004, p. 3).

Feminist theories seek to explain women's subordination. However, there are several different lines within feminism, thus not all see the same causes or have the same approaches. Liberal feminists see the removal of legal obstacles in society as the solution to subordination. The post-liberalists see the deeply rooted and underlying structure of patriarchy in society, which means that removing legal obstacles would not be enough (Tickner 2014). Post-colonial and poststructuralist feminists believe one cannot generalize about all women because the experience of subordination will differ from one society to another, or even within the same society. Subordination is relative to the experience of class, race and gender. Feminists around the world do have different views and goals. Naturally, this is also a product of different experiences and realities, which further supports the importance of paying attention to local realities.

3.5.1 Feminist security studies

Concerns about broadening the security concept was a crucial part of the development of feminist research in the 1960s and 1970s. Feminists argue for a broadening of the concept to include both human rights and empowered civilian societies, as well as security against want (Wibben 2011). These are all ideas present in the more recent concept of human security.

Feminist security studies are attentive to nuances and to lived experiences. As the non-traditional security issues are becoming more salient - for example human trafficking or conflict-related sexual violence, the more conventional security studies have started to recognize feminist approaches (Shepherd 2013). While many theorists would consider gender irrelevant to understanding security, feminists argue that gender is to be found in all areas of security. There are several perspectives on gender and security, both feminist and non-feminist. What distinguishes them, according to Sjoberg (2012), is the feminists' attention on gender as a power relation in the dynamics between masculinities and femininities. Although gender is not the only way to look at security, Sjoberg (2012) argues that security cannot be fully defined, understood or obtained without the help from feminist theorizing.

IR is a discipline born out of the experience of war. Naturally, violence has been a central area of study in the discipline. However, the study of violence has usually been limited to appearance

of state-authorized violence in wars (Steans 1998). Feminism has contributed to studies of security by providing alternative approaches to power and violence, away from the conventional state-centric focus. Feminist security studies are particularly concerned with the continuum of violence between times of war and peace (Wibben 2011). Personal narratives are often used to identify this continuum. Johan Galtung (1969) was one of the first to see security as not only the absence of war, but that it also had individual and social elements. He emphasized that peace is not just absence of war, and saw the need to establish conditions for social justice.

Women in postconflict societies are deeply affected by security, or its absence (Aoláin 2013). Aoláin further argues that women are systematically excluded from decision-making regarding security for their own environment, for their own lives or even for their own bodies. This exclusion, which is based on gender, is unfortunately not uncommon. It is generally acknowledged that establishment of political and legal institutions and its operation is lacking a gender dimension in postconflict societies (Aoláin 2013). However, Aoláin sees the importance of understanding the actual consequences the exclusion of gender in security discourse has for women.

Including women in political processes might lead to different approaches to national interests and security. It might create more inclusive peace strategies and fair policies leading up to a reconciliation. Therefore, in excluding the concept of gender from the security dialogue or from political processes, one overlooks the important role of women. Sjoberg (2009) emphasizes how feminism is not about adding women to masculine frameworks, rather it is about transforming the ways of being and knowing.

3.5.2 Protection scenarios and constructed knowledge

While feminists are all concerned about the well-being of all women around the world, keeping a critical eye on what is better for whom is always important. Post-colonialists have criticized how the West seem to have constructed knowledge about non-Western women. This knowledge is based on the experiences of Western women, who have lived in a different reality. Thus the knowledge cannot be transferred and generalized into a concept of 'third world women'. Stabile and Kumar (2005) write about Western protection scenarios, arguing that these scenarios actually coincide with traditional thinking about women. It implies that the use of women as

symbols is more important than their actual reality. Instead of creating a label of 'third world women' within such a protection scenario, one should focus on breaking down the power structure within it. That way, development agendas and political frameworks create a broader sense of ownership for the local women. Failing to recognize women in their local context will only create shallow gains.

A traditional notion teaches us that men are the protectors of women, who are in need of protection. Therefore, one needs to break down this protection myth (Tickner 2014). It forces us to reconsider who we think of as the warriors and who are the people in need of protection. There is a conventional distinction between protector and the protected, which has been challenged by feminists. According to feminists, this is important because the distinction hides women's involvement in wars. It further distinguishes how women suffer from war, in terms of displacement, as carers with sole responsibility for elderly, disabled and children, or disproportionate access to aid, food, health services, but also jobs, land, identity papers, water and livestock (Steans 1998).

Post-colonial feminists criticize how Western feminism has constructed knowledge about non-Western women (Tickner 2014). Western feminism has been criticized for being self-proclaimed protectors of the rights of third world women. They are criticized for speaking on behalf of all women, as if the western understanding of feminism is the right for all women in the world, seeking to construct their actions and thoughts. This has similar traits to the protection myth, as mentioned above, because this kind of discourse entails a degree of superiority, as well as constructed knowledge of the needs of presumably helpless third world women. Afghanistan makes a good example.

3.5.3 Feminist perspectives on human security

The human security concept is drawn towards the individual. It is worth noticing that feminism made this shift towards the individual already in the 1980s (Nuruzzaman 2006). If the state is not focusing on its individuals, nor is there a focus on women. Feminist security studies and human security both ask 'whose security'? They both look beyond war and physical violence, to include interpersonal violence, rape, poverty, and environmental challenges. Just as in feminism, the exclusion of women (and minorities) is challenged by the human security

approach. Although, while human security does not deny the existence of patriarchy, it privileges all individuals rather than solely women (Tadjbakhsh & Chenoy 2007).

As mentioned above, human security has been criticized for the lack of focus on gender. Hoogensen and Stuvøy (2006) have explained how a gender-informed approach to human security is useful. They argue that we need not only the human security perspective, but a gendered human security perspective to achieve transitional justice, by creating "a discursive space where the structurally excluded actor can speak" (2006, p. 224). More attention to women's rights and gender sensitive approaches can thus be achieved through a human security framework.

Feminists have criticized human security for being too conventional in its notion of state security, and for being too broad in its perception of security threats, resulting in actual security problems losing its significance (Tripp 2013). Further, the concept is very defensive, and not proactive enough to pursue peace-making and change structural problems. Here, feminists can contribute by placing peace as a goal, by seeking to eliminate gender inequalities in society.

The world has in recent decades paid more focus to the issues regarding women, peace and security. Governments have started to treat gender-based violence as a public issue, not just a private one, which is much thanks to the liberal feminists (Staudt 2011). The world is also more concerned about the importance of including women in reconciliation and peace processes. This is crucial for changing the muted political voices of women. It is perhaps best demonstrated by the UN Security Council Resolution 1325 which emphasizes the participation and the protection of women in times of conflict. However, "People may have the legal rights and protection from discrimination and violence, but in reality structural constraints, including lack of income, education and access to legal system, as well as cultural constraints, may prevent them from exercising those rights" (Tripp 2013, p. 8.). Unfortunately, many women living in rural areas, within closed traditional communities, are facing difficulties benefitting from any of these laws and reforms. Post-liberal feminists continue to emphasize how gender inequalities still exist in societies even long after they have adopted formal legal equality policies (Tickner 2014). Afghanistan is no exception.

Chapter Four

4.   Methods and Data

The research is conducted as a qualitative study, focusing on four different Afghan provinces, namely Faryab, Kabul, Badakhshan and Ghazni. The research for this thesis has been conducted as a combined desk-study, based on articles, reports, briefs and news articles, and qualitative interviewing. The research is grounded in feminist and human security theory. I have conducted individual interviews with Afghan rural women with help from the Norwegian Afghanistan Committee (NAC), complemented by key informant interview with NAC staff through Skype. Thus, the research is based on both primary and secondary data.

I started with locating the area of research before developing the relevant research questions for the topic. I then identified theories that I find relevant to illuminate the findings, which I later on sought to link to the empirical findings generated from this research. It was therefore necessary to do a literature review of the chosen theory as well as reviewing the broader literature on gender and security in Afghanistan, which became valuable for the discussion. After establishing the theoretical ground, I first reviewed the broader literature and reviewed previous research on Afghanistan, mainly focused on published articles and reports, and books.

4.1 Collecting data

To collect the data needed for this research, interviewing was the most suitable method. Qualitative interviewing is a good fit for conducting this research as it is particularly helpful in generating detailed examination of a topic (Bryman 2012). Combined with the study of previous research on the topic, it makes up the foundation for the analysis and discussion in this thesis.

4.1.1 Planning the interviews

Due to my lack of access to Afghan rural communities, the interviews with Afghan rural women were conducted with help from NAC in the beginning of October 2016. I prepared an interview guide in advance (see Appendix 1) which NAC used in carrying out the individual interviews. I discussed questions with NAC staff beforehand, to get valuable input and advice, and remove

questions that would be hard to understand or would simply not be suitable. The interview guide provided a list of specific topics to be covered and questions to be asked.

The interview guide thus provided for doing a structured interview, as it otherwise would be too time consuming. It would have been hard to analyse narratives and stories if one is not there to hear them, and follow up on interesting factors or unexpected turns. Furthermore, it would have been even harder to analyse another researcher's translation of the stories to English, as some of the nuances might get lost. I also considered that it might have been uncomfortable for the respondents to elaborate about their personal experiences and thus a structured interview would be easier for the respondents. NAC translated the interview guides to Dari and conducted the interviews in four different provinces, over a period of a few weeks.

4.1.2 The structure of the interviews

As mentioned above, qualitative interviewing is helpful in providing rich, detailed answers. Qualitative interviews are usually unstructured or semi-structured interviews. This is valuable as it gives the researcher flexibility to follow up on interesting themes or comments and clearing up inconsistencies in answers (Bryman 2012). However, as I was not able to conduct the interviews myself, the interviews were best conducted as structured, meaning all respondents were asked the exact same questions and in the same order. The interview included both survey-based questions as well as questions that give the interviewee room for some elaboration. This interview approach enabled me to ask questions that encouraged women to express their feelings and share their experiences. While the answers will not be generalizable to the whole population, it can give important indications for the experiences of the community. The main goal of the interviews is achieving a deeper understanding of the individual experiences.

As some of the questions can be quite sensitive and therefore can be hard to talk about, I sought, in collaboration with NAC, to develop questions that are easily understood and thus easy to answer. Some questions in the interview guide might overlap at times, however, this is done on purpose. By asking key questions in different ways and at different times throughout the interview, it might help provide better and more complete answers.

The most important questions in the interview guide was directed at the women's experience of insecurity: how often they are afraid, what they are afraid of, if they have experienced any kind of violence and what are the most important security challenges in the local community.

They were also asked about their thoughts on the most limiting obstacles in their lives and the experience with discrimination. Furthermore, they were asked about the most important conflicts in the local community, who are involved in solving them. Most importantly they were asked whether and how they are participating in solving conflicts, as well as the reasons for not participating whenever that was the case.

4.1.3 Selection of location and participants

The interviews were conducted in districts where NAC is already working, in the provinces of Badakhshan, Faryab, Ghazni and Kabul. Although the latter is not a rural area, the girls come from various villages in the nearby provinces around Kabul. They were interviewed in Kabul because they all live and study there, and thus it was easy to organize the interviews for NAC staff in Kabul. 8 women were interviewed in each province, making a total of 32 interviews. The selection of location for the interviews can be said to be out of convenience, due to NAC having access to these particular districts and therefore being able to conduct interviews. A convenience sample is simply one that is available and accessible to the researcher (Bryman 2012).

The women in this research are between the age of 18 and 56. They all come from different ethnic and cultural backgrounds. They have also different levels of education and social status, and different occupations, as students, employees, or housewives. Approximately 56% of the women are married. The selection of participants is also perceived to be out of convenience, because of the difficult access to the rural communities in Afghanistan, due to security challenges, both for NAC staff and for local women. The composition of participants is demonstrated in the table below.

Table 1 Composition of participants

Location	Occupation	Age	Background
Faizabad (Badakhshan)	5 working women 1 housewife 1 unemployed 1 student	21-30	4 Shia/Ismaili 4 Sunni/Tajik
Maimana (Faryab)	3 working women 4 housewives 1 student	28-56	1 Sunni/ Tajik, 1 Sunni/Turkmen 6 Sunni/Uzbek
Jaghori (Ghazni)	4 working women 3 housewives 1 student	22-40	8 Shia/Hazara
Kabul (Kabul)	8 students	18-26	8 Sunni/Pashtun (From Ghazni, Kabul, Khost, Logar, Paktia and Paktika provinces)

Key informants

After the interviews were conducted, I conducted a key informant interview through Skype with two NAC staff, including one of the women who had carried out the interviews and translated the answers to English. This was done in order to clarify certain words and meanings and solve uncertainties regarding the answers I received, but also to get additional information on the topic. Key informants are valuable for obtaining further information about social settings, events or people (Bryman 2012). The Skype interview was organized as a conversation and the main themes discussed regarded the interviews and female participation in Community Development Councils.

Roundtable discussion

With the help from a participant at a workshop in Kabul November 2016, I was able to distribute some questions regarding women's participation in CDCs or other arenas in local communities, in a roundtable discussion. The roundtable was composed of six female NAC staff from around the country. The information obtained from this discussion has been used as further background information to support the findings.

4.2 Analysis

Coding

When receiving the results, I immediately started a coding process. I looked for trends in the interview data, seeking to place it behind labels. This was done to make the data more

accessible, understandable and to uncover patterns (Berg & Lune 2012). I used a combination of pre-defined labels and labels that emerged throughout the analysing process. I looked for major trends in the different provinces, which did provide interesting insights in terms of differences in the security picture, levels of education, and level of participation. I also did numeric coding, which helped generate some basic statistical models, regarding the most important conflicts, education level, and participation levels, although the purpose is not to generalize to the broader population.

Analysis

After coding the results, I made the analysis in light of the established theoretical framework, before reaching a conclusion.

While analysing the answers, it became apparent that some of the questions did not work. It might have been lost in translation or the question might have been hard to understand. An example is "Who or what are people most afraid of in the community?" To this question many of the respondents referred to *who were most afraid* in the community, which was not the answer the question was supposed to generate. For the questions regarding participation I realized that the questions asked did not provide much details on how or where women participate in conflict resolution, and I got quite different answers from what I had anticipated. However, during the analysis, I realized that that the answers I did receive are perhaps just as important.

4.3 Advantages and limitations

The main methodological challenge for this research was that I was not able to carry out the interviews myself. The thesis therefore relied on second hand information, where some data faced the risk of getting lost in translation between Dari and English, which again might have affected the validity of the data. One the other hand, it was a great advantage to the research that NAC staff conducted the interviews, as they are more familiar with the setting and the language, which was crucial in order to provide results based on the respondents' own terms.

The fact that four different interviewers conducted interviews in the different provinces might have affected the outcome of the interviews. I cannot know if there are differences in the way they have asked the questions, which made have had effect on the way respondents have

answered. I cannot know to what degree each interviewer has encouraged respondents to elaborate on their answers. However, by creating a structured interview guide, I sought to avoid any risks of differences in the interviews creating biases. Obviously, when an interview guide is translated from one language to another, and then back again, some parts or nuances face the risk of being lost. Even though, this is also a risk I sought to limit by doing structured interviews.

In order to see which questions work well and which do not, I could have done a pilot test for the interview guide before carrying out the interviews. That could have given me the possibility to remove or reformulate the questions that appeared not to have worked as intended, which could have provided me with more accurate data.

4.3.1 Representativeness

There is a vast variety in the composition of participants. All come from the village level, but are interviewed in the cities at district level. They belong to different age groups, have different educational background and work experiences. However, when using a convenience sampling method, one cannot know how representative the data is (Bryman 2012). Thus, one cannot generalize to the wider population.

In this research, there might be a risk of biased answers. As it is conducted mostly out of convenience, it can be that many respondents are used to be in touch with international NGOs and staff, some are also working for NGOs, which in turn can affect how they answer questions or look upon the situation. There are also important differences in ethnic and religious affiliation. Therefore, I cannot claim that these women will be representative for their respective communities.

4.4 Triangulation

The research will follow the principle of triangulation. Triangulation is used in order to cross-check the data by using more than one method or source of data in the research (Bryman 2012). For this research, triangulation refers to the different approaches to data sampling, namely literature review and desk-study, and qualitative interviewing. Further, it will also use different sources of data, such as books, policy briefs from governments and NGOs, articles and scientific reports. I have also been able to use baselines from former research conducted by NAC. Although it was not my intention to repeat what has already been done, former research

provide good guidance and might be crucial for supporting my results and arguments. The research has thus used three methods of data sampling:

1. Literature review
2. Primary research in the form of interviews, and conversations with key informants
3. Secondary research based on documents in the form of information gathered from previous research, reports, and policy briefs, to be analysed.

The research has used both quantitative and qualitative methods, even though it is first and foremost a qualitative study. The interview guide (see Appendix 1), included both survey questions and questions with room for elaboration. The survey questions gave the respondent pre-made answers to choose from. This was combined with questions where respondents were able to elaborate, which gave me interesting insights to personal stories and experiences to analyse. The data was then coded accordingly. Although it was no intention to create generalizations, the data provided an opportunity to generate some relevant statistics for the scope of this research.

4.5 Ethical considerations

The research follows the ethical principles, including doing no harm to participants, no violation of privacy as well as no deception (Bryman 2012). It did so by informing about the full scope and purpose of the study and assure participants' anonymity, before asking participants for informed consent, included in the interview guide handed over to NAC. By doing so, it has hopefully created an environment where the participants felt safe to provide complete, elaborative answers. Further, the thesis has followed ethical principles for using secondary sources, including correct citation of documents.

However, I am aware that my own identities as a current student of International Relations with background from Social Anthropology, combined with other experiences will affect my understanding of the Afghan rural women's situation. I want to emphasize that these are my own evaluations and interpretations of the situation and realities of Afghan women.

4.6 Research context

An introduction to the cultural and religious context in the areas where research has been conducted is useful, as Afghanistan has a great ethnic, cultural and religious diversity. Hazaras

constitute the majority of the country's 15-20 % Shia population, together with a significant number of Ismailis. Hazaras are generally more progressive in women's rights to education and public activities than other groups (MRG 2016). Many educated women are as active as men on civic and political arenas. They are also perceived to be more eager to educate their daughters. Pashtuns on the other hand, are among the most conservative. They have a strict, social code of conduct, requiring adherence to established customs (MRG 2016). Hospitality, family honour and protection of female relatives are among the most important. Traditionally, women have been excluded from activities outside the home. Tajiks, like Pashtuns, follows Sunni Islam. Unlike Pashtuns, they do not have any special social structure, but instead appear to have adopted customs of the neighbours in the areas where they live. Also Turkmen and Uzbek are Sunni Muslims, traditionally residing in the northern part of the country. They are famous for their handicrafts, which is an important part of the local economy and is mainly women's work (MRG 2016).

The provinces

Faryab is located in northern Afghanistan, bordering Turkmenistan, with Maimana as the provincial capital. The province has approximately 900,000 inhabitants, whereof 88% are classified as rural and the economy is based mainly on agriculture. Faryab is one of two provinces with an Uzbek majority (51-57%), but is also home to sizable Tajik (21-34%) and Pashtun (14%) minorities, and Turkmen (4%). It is considered one of the most ethnically diverse provinces (Gompelman 2011). The literacy rate is 31% for men and 22% for women. Access to educational facilities and health facilities is limited due to long distances and lack of financial resources. Faryab province is relatively secure compared to many other provinces in the southern and eastern parts of the country, however insecurities do exist where Taliban has increased presence (Gompelman 2011). A study by Gompelman (2011) found that further drivers of insecurity in the province include ethnic tensions, poverty, scarce resources and ideology.

Badakhshan is situated in the north-eastern corner of the country, bordering Pakistan in the south, Tajikistan in the north, and China in the far east (AREU & The World Bank 2004), with Faizabad as its provincial capital. Badakhshan has 27 districts, many of which are inaccessible by car during the cold winter months. The province' 1 million inhabitants are composed of a Tajik majority, as well as Uzbeks, Pashtuns, Hazaras, Quirgic and Baluch. The Ismailis also form a sizable number. The province has the second highest female literacy rate in the country

(RRERS Badakhshan n.d.). As Badakhshan was never under Taliban control, most of the education system is intact (AREU & The World Bank 2004). Compared to other provinces, Badakhshan has a better security situation. Economically, the province has relied mainly on forestry and animal husbandry.

Ghazni province is located in the central region of Afghanistan. With more than 1 million inhabitants it is the country's 6th most populated province (UNFPA & CSO 2003). The population is divided at 49% Pashtun, 45% Hazara, 4% Tajik, with other varying minorities. Religious groups are mainly Sunni Pashtuns and Tajiks, and Shiite Hazaras. Hazaras are most centred around the districts of Jaghori, Malistan, Ajeristan, Nowar and Jaghtu. Security is good in Hazara dominated districts (RRERS Ghazni n.d). Ghazni has 19 districts where 95,1% of the population live in rural areas. The capital, Ghazni city, is the only urban centre (UNFPA & CSO 2003). The overall literacy rate is 22,7%.

Kabul is located in eastern Afghanistan and holds the country's capital, Kabul city. The city is the most populated in the country, with its estimated 4 million people. The province has diverse ethnic groups, the largest being Pashtuns and Tajiks who settled in the area centuries ago, along with other groups as a result of immigration from other provinces. Kabul holds several prestigious educational institutions and has traditionally been seen as an educational centre (RRERS Kabul n.d.).

For a more visual understanding of the location of the various provinces, figure 1 includes a map of Afghanistan's provinces.

Figure 1 Map of province

MAP OF AFGHANISTAN

Source: Central Statistics Office. Retrieved from UC Davis (2013)

Chapter Five

5. Findings

In order to answer the research questions, the research looks at women's participation in conflict resolution at the local level. It seeks to identify what challenges they are facing, but also their opportunities, for participation. Further, it investigates security challenges, understood in the broader framework of human security. Using personal narratives is helpful in highlighting the nuances and individual experiences (Wibben 2011). This is what the research sought to achieve with the interviews, although it was hard as I could not conduct interviews myself. Even so, the interviews provided many personal stories and experiences beyond any expectations. In this chapter is a presentation of the results obtained from the individual interviews, along with information from key informants.

5.1 Security challenges

From analysing the interview results, there is a range of different security threats experienced by the women, both more conventional security threats, such as poverty and threats from armed conflict, to cultural challenges, like discrimination and oppression. It is evident that restrictions on women's freedom of mobility and lack of independence, ability to get an education and permission to work outside the home, are of utmost concern across the provinces. This in turn, results in the lack of opportunities in general. However, types of security challenges experienced as most pressuring differ between the provinces.

In Kabul, the women have stated that they are most afraid of terrorist attacks, suicide bombers and violent conflict, concerning the Taliban, ISK, al Qaeda or other groups. Many are afraid that they will be attacked by terrorists either on their way to or in Kabul city. As many as seven out of eight women in Kabul have responded that they do not feel safe when travelling to and from school/other places. Further concerns mentioned by the women in Kabul includes unemployment and the risk of loosing their loved ones. When asked about the most important security challenges affecting their lives, cultural and family barriers, and economic problems are mentioned with most frequency. Regarding challenges affecting their ability to participate, lack of mobility and gender discrimination is emphasised, along with the insecure environment.

The data for Ghazni suggests there is a less precarious security situation in the district of Jaghori. In Ghazni all women stated that they do feel safe when travel to and from school/other places. The women seem to think that they are mostly safe from threats when in their village, however, they all mention the insecurity on the highway to Kabul, and to Ghazni city, as a major concern. Because of Taliban roadblocks they are worried they might be stopped, kidnapped or killed, which has happened to other people they know. "Many teachers were kidnapped by the Taliban during last year when they were travelling to Ghazni city for their salary" (Teacher, 24, Ghazni). Furthermore, this roadblock is creating difficulties for the women who would want to continue their studies in Kabul. The road is dangerous and the families will not let their daughters travel to pursue higher education. In the villages there are few insecurities, except increasing levels of robbery. When asked what they are afraid of, most women referred to the Taliban or the roadblocks, although ethnic conflicts and robbery were also mentioned. One woman stated that she is not afraid.

In the results from Badakhshan, it does not appear to be any pressuring threats from armed conflict in the communities, although many answered that they are afraid of potential attacks, not having adequate security, or loosing their loved ones. Many women referred to domestic violence as the main source of fear: "I am afraid of my abusive husband" (Government staff, 23, Badakhshan). The women with Ismaili background interviewed in Badakhshan are worried about potential ethnic conflict and attacks by Taliban, or ISK, adding to the insecurity among the Shia minorities. Only two women stated that they feel unsafe when travelling. Regarding security challenges; insecurity, domestic violence, and strict social structures are affecting their lives the most. Lack of experience and unemployment are factors limiting participation.

Also in Faryab, only two women stated they do not feel safe when travelling between their home and school/other places. Economic problems, loss of family members, not having education, family barriers and displacement are all security challenges affecting their lives. Two women referred to the difficulties they experience after being widowed, and another two referred to killing of their family members. Depression and mental problems caused by insecurities and a hopeless situation is also of concern. The same reasons are mentioned as limiting factors to their participation. Many are afraid of war and insecurity, but most noteworthy is how many are most afraid of their husbands and domestic violence. Both in Faryab and Badakhshan, domestic violence appears to be the most important security threat in the everyday lives of women.

The women were asked how often they are afraid. Figure 2 shows the overall level of fear for all four provinces. As demonstrated in the figure, more than half of the respondents are often or always afraid. The level of fear was highest in Badakhshan and Faryab, somewhat lower in Kabul, and in Ghazni no one answered 'often' or 'always'.

Figure 2: Level of fear
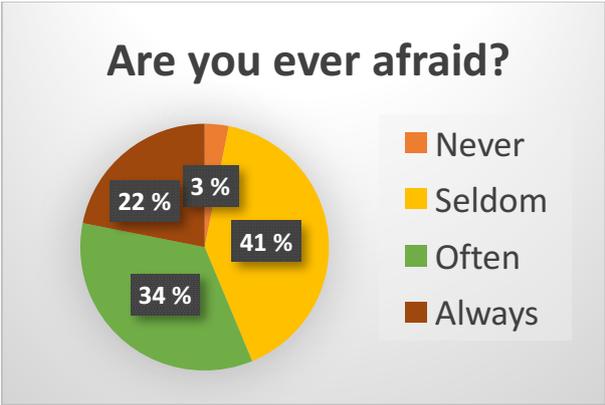
The pie chart is based on the frequency of responses from all women throughout all four provinces.

The women were also asked about travelling alone or with mahram[1], and whether they go to the market by themselves or with family members. In Badakhshan, Faryab and Kabul the great majority reported that they travel with mahram. In Faryab everyone travels with mahram, and in both Badakhshan and Kabul, six women do. Furthermore, whenever they go to the market the majority and Faryab and everyone in Kabul will go with family member, although four women in Badakhshan go alone. In Ghazni on the other hand, women appear to be able to move more freely on their own, as only two women said they travel with mahram, three travel alone, and three do both. Also when going to the market, the majority in Ghazni will do so unaccompanied.

5.1.1 Domestic violence

Domestic violence is evidently a big issue, particularly in Faryab and Badakhshan. Most noteworthy is the high level of violence at home, either from husbands or in-laws, followed by acts of forced marriage, or child marriage. One women recounts: "My husband used to beat me, when we were together. My premature wedding made my life full of obstacles" (Unemployed, 22, Badakhshan). She is now divorced, which does not seem to have made her life any easier.

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[1] Mahram is a male relative chaperone (UNAMA & OHCHR 2009)

She has a bachelor degree, and said she would like to participate in conflict resolutions, but she is not allowed. Furthermore, domestic violence in form of both physical violence and a forced, child marriage has had its impact on her life; "I don't trust my abilities now, I have a low self-esteem. If they didn't force me to marry or I didn't take out divorce, I guess I wouldn't be miserable" (Unemployed, 22, Badakhshan). This is an indication of how domestic violence can affect a woman's life.

Domestic violence is not only an issue among those with lower levels of education. This is permeating all levels of society, from housewives without education to young working women in government departments. As one respondent explains: "The only obstacle I face is that I have an abusive husband, who doesn't understand and trust me" (Government staff, 23, Badakhshan). Below are three more examples of experience with domestic violence in Faryab and Badakhshan:

> "My husband went to Iran for work and I am with 3 children with my mother in-law and father in-law. They beat me, several times I broke my hand and went to the hospital" (Housewife, 30, Faryab)

> "A woman of my neighbourhood burned herself one week ago. She is in the hospital now. The reason of burn was domestic violence". (Housewife, 36, Faryab)

> "I am not sure if you can call it violence, but they engaged me without even letting me know" (Teacher, 22, Badakhshan).

Domestic violence is also a concern in Ghazni, where a few women report that they have been beaten by their husbands or in-laws. One woman recounts how she was forcedly married and when she was a newly-wed, her mother in-law used to beat her so that neighbours and family members would come to rescue her. She further emphasized the importance of spreading awareness about violence against women and its consequences, particularly for future generations.

5.1.2 Health

Even thought they were not asked specifically about health concerns, the women nevertheless mentioned it as a considerable challenge. The lack of access to health facilities is critical in

some communities. From Ghazni, some families must embark on the dangerous road to Kabul, worried they will get stuck in roadblocks or might never get back. They emphasize the need for further development of provincial hospitals. Depression and bad mental health are mentioned as big concerns to many, particularly in Faryab, and to a lesser degree in Badakhshan and Ghazni. It is in most cases mentioned as a consequence of the other insecurities. Some women are concerned about their own depression, lack of moral, lack of motivation, due to all insecurities they are facing daily. Some are concerned for the mental health of their family members. Lack of access to health facilities is also adding to the risk of child mortality. As a young woman from Ghazni explains, she lost her baby in childbirth because she was forced to have the baby at home without help. It goes without saying that loosing a child can have severe impact on a woman's life. In Kabul, health concerns appeared to be less of an issue.

5.1.3 Rights awareness

Only half of the women interview had any knowledge of Afghan laws protecting the rights of women. The knowledge is highest among the women from Ghazni and the students in Kabul. This might be because the women from Ghazni appears to be more interactive with the community, creating more awareness, and the key informants in Kabul made me aware that the girls interviewed in Kabul are young students, and therefore might have different ideas about their future and their rights. The laws women are referring to throughout all provinces are mostly 'equal rights for men and women,' 'the education law,' 'no violence against women,' 'human rights,' 'no discrimination between genders' and 'the constitution.'

When asked to elaborate on what the laws mean to them, some answered that if a man has the right to go to university, so has the woman. If a man has the right to work, so has the woman. Men and women are equal, giving men and women equal rights and opportunities. However, it becomes clear that most of the women see these laws as "just a piece of paper" and therefore not a reality. "Equal rights are not implemented in our country" (Student, 23, Kabul). Because of cultural barriers, laws do not get implemented in practise. This applies to the whole country, but even more so in the remote areas (key informants). So even though there are national policies on gender mainstreaming, and against violence and discrimination, it does not necessarily reach the local levels. As an example, a 40-year-old housewife from Faryab said she would like the government to forbid domestic violence.

5.1.4 Lack of education

Of the most important security challenges affecting their lives and the ability to participate, the women mention illiteracy, and lack of education and formal skills. Furthermore, family restrictions on girls' education and ability to work outside the home is also mentioned. The lack of education and skills is therefore closely related to the cultural barriers, although it might vary across the provinces. A young teacher from Faryab described how it feels like violence from her own family, when they did not allow her to continue higher education abroad, where she had the opportunity to pursue a Master's degree.

5.1.5 Consequences

The respondents were in the end of the interview asked to mention the most important consequences of the security challenges they are facing. Among the most important answers throughout the provinces are economic problems, lack of education and knowledge, an increase in violence against women, lack of trust in society, lack of female participation, illiteracy, lack of infrastructure, underdevelopment and migration.

5.2 Community conflicts

Community conflicts might differ from one village to another, but there are visible trends in each province, according to the interviews. Conflicts related to land and domestic violence stand out as the two overall major sources of conflict in the communities according to the respondents. Land is the only conflict which appear to be of great concern in most villages throughout all provinces. Unfortunately, the question did not give room for elaboration on what the conflicts related to land, water, domestic violence, marriage/divorce, money and armed conflict constitute.

The women were asked to rank disputes over land, water, money, domestic violence, marriage/divorce and armed conflict between 'not important' and 'very important.' This gave clear indications on the level of importance of these disputes in the communities. However, it has not generated data on other important community conflicts, not mentioned as pre-made answers. Therefore, there might be other conflicts than the ones mentioned in these findings. Even though the interview guide did leave room to mention 'other disputes,' non of the respondents have done so.

In Faryab and Badakhshan, domestic violence and marriage/divorce issues are clearly of utmost concern. In Faryab, all women considered domestic violence to be an important source of community disputes, and most in Badakhshan did too. To further support this finding is the high level of experience with domestic violence established above. Nonetheless, it would be interesting to see whether men would rank domestic violence as high as women have done. In Kabul, domestic violence appears to be less of a concern. Instead, the women see armed conflict, war and insecurity as the main issues in their communities. This does not seem to be of high importance in the other provinces. Water only appears to be a major concern among the communities in Ghazni, and is together with land conflicts the two most important dispute areas. Disputes related to money appears to be slightly more important in Ghazni than the other provinces. Figure 3 shows the distribution of the most important conflicts in the local communities based on each province.

Figure 3: Community conflicts
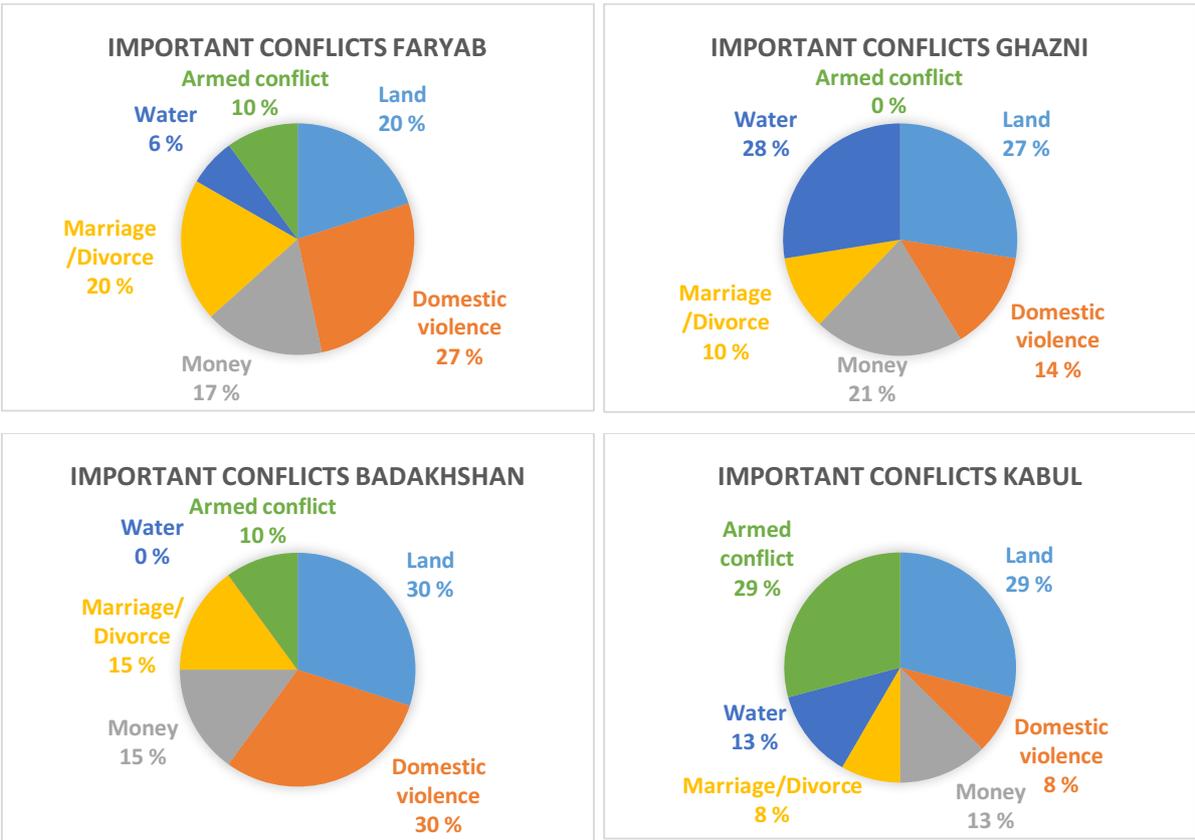
The pie charts are based on respondents' perceptions of the 'important' and 'very important' conflicts in the local community.

There is broad agreement when asked about who solves the disputes. As visible in Figure 4, most women said it is the responsibility of the local shura[2] or CDC. Nearly all women responded that the community elders and religious leaders are also involved in solving disputes. Many women also mentioned family members as important actors in dispute resolution. It did not appear to be any notable difference between the provinces.

A few women mentioned that if the usual dispute solving bodies are unable to solve the conflict, the police, the district office and human rights department might intervene. The Department of Women's Affairs (DOWA), teachers, and the jirga was all mentioned once, and one respondent answered that there is no one who solves disputes.

Figure 4: Dispute solving institutions
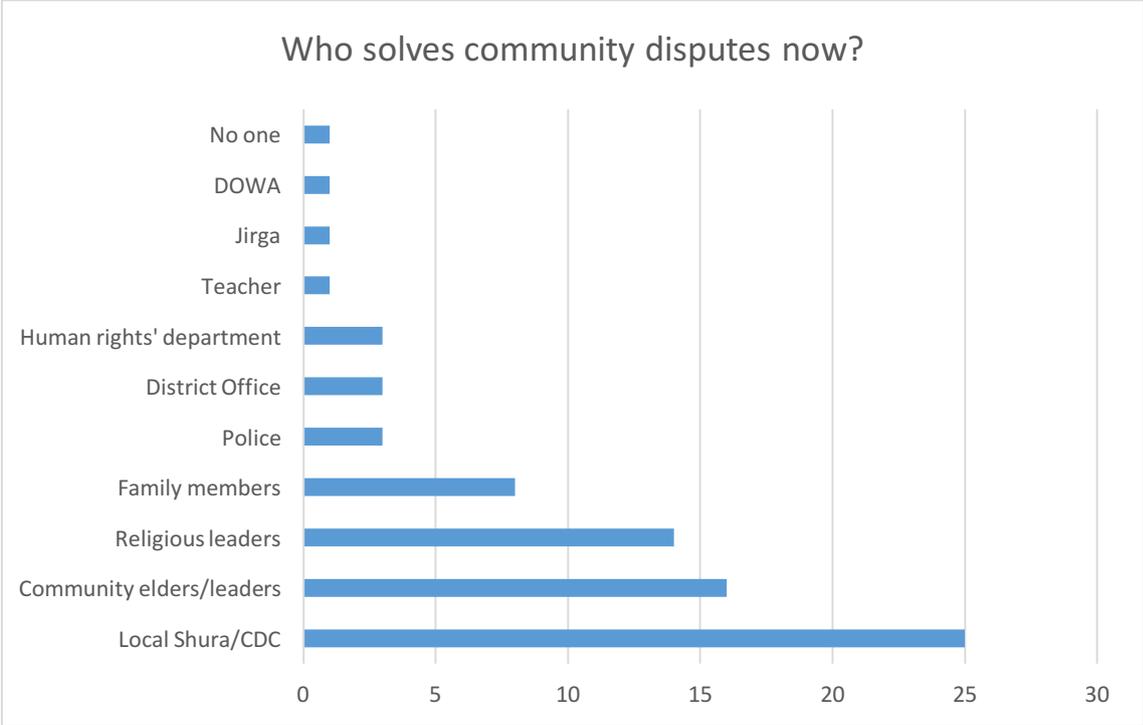
Based on the frequency of which each dispute solving institution was mentioned by respondents in all provinces, as answer to the question 'who solves community disputes now?'

In further elaboration of community conflicts, the women made it clear that there are different types of conflicts, and levels of conflicts, referring to both domestic and public conflicts. Generally, the domestic conflicts are solved within the household and more public conflicts are

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[2] Further clarification from the key informants led me to understand that in this context a local shura actually refers to the CDC, and is not to be confused with a traditional shura.

solved by the local shura or community- and religious leaders. However, the domestic conflicts might be just as important as the ones regarding the whole community, due to the collective mind-set. The private feuds in that way seems to be part of the wider area of community conflicts, as family life is often intertwined with community dynamics. Furthermore, as mentioned in the interviews, private disputes are often transferred to local shura, elders and religious leaders, whenever the case is too severe to be settled in the household.

5.3 Participation in community decision-making and conflict resolution

In the interviews, the question regarding participation was divided in two main questions; 'Do you participate in solving disputes?' and 'Do you participate in community decision-making?' with several follow-up questions. I would like to maintain this divide of participation in disputes and decision-making, as I discovered some important differences in this regard.

5.3.1 Disputes

It becomes clear from the answers that solving disputes translates to conflicts within the extended family or neighbourhood. Approximately 44% (14 out of 32) of the respondents answered that they do participate in dispute resolution, which appears to be a quite high number. Many respondents point to the important role of women in private conflict resolution, which does not require the involvement of the local shura or community elders. Women participate as negotiators and give advice, depending on experience. They participate in cases where their knowledge and experience is needed. Thus, age becomes an important factor for enabling participation. From the key informant interview, it was clear that marriage might also be an enabling factor, both for participation in private but also public issues.

From the interviews it appears that women do not participate in community disputes concerning land, water, and money. These are typically male-dominated decisions because they are at the community level, where there are typically mostly male members in mediation institutions. This appears to be the case in all provinces. However, many women do say that they participate in resolving disputes, referring to the domestic sphere and consultancy in cases where they are needed. This includes disputes over marriage and divorce and in many cases domestic violence or other issues where they might have experience or valuable opinions. They might participate in their own family, but also extended to neighbouring houses. This is an arena where they do

exercise power. It appears important to understand this divide between representation in the domestic and the public sphere in close relation to the structure of the society.

According to a key informant, the students in Kabul participate mainly in resolving disputes in the hostel where they live (meaning between the women), in their family, and with their neighbours. This corresponds with the interview results. Usually the youngest women do not participate, which might be a factor for the lower level of participation among Kabul women. Often only older, married women are perceived to have the experience needed for solving disputes and are involved in internal house conflicts and other conflicts belonging to the domestic sphere. This is particularly visible in the answers from Badakhshan and Faryab, and to a lesser degree in Ghazni. A key informant said women's participation in the domestic sphere is typical for the whole country, however, in some areas it is stricter than others. It can be stricter in more conservative Pashtun areas, or areas with more pressuring security threats limiting participation even in the neighbourhood. Furthermore, it is usually not good for a girl who is young and not married to go to mediate in disputes as she does not have experience. However, if she is educated and trusted, she might participate anyhow.

5.3.2 Decision-making

The question regarding decision-making was understood as participation in local shura or CDCs and higher level decision making and conflict resolution bodies in the community. From the interviews, it is evident that men are the ones who usually take the important decisions in the community. However, around 34% (11 out of 32) of the women answered that they do participate in decision-making, even though most women considered their own participation to be perceived as highly symbolic and that they have no real power. Of the 34% women who participate in community decision-making, only a few participate as CDC members. Others have participated in particular meetings or elections, or been involved in cases where their experience has been valued. Among the women who participate, some express their doubts; that even if they are able to share their thoughts and opinions, they are not sure whether their voices really do get heard.

There are challenges regarding women's lack of representation at community levels. Women tend to play more of a symbolic role and even if they are active participants, their voices are rarely heard. Others feel that women are completely expelled from having a voice: "We never

get a chance to speak. In my community as a woman the only thing I should do is to be home" (Housewife, 21, Badakhshan)

There is a slight positive correlation between level of education and participation in community decision-making. A few women point to their good education and relevant experience as a source of respect, from both men and women. As educated women they have the knowledge to participate and be influential, and knowing that they possess that knowledge, makes them confident in their role. A key informant also mention marriage as a factor that might increase chances of participation because you have more experience in life to give advice and take part in decisions. Many of the respondents do point to their experience in life when talking about level of participation. Most importantly, the majority of respondents believe that women can do a good job contributing, especially in women's issues. Only a few women said they would not wish to participate at all.

Women appear to be most active in community life in Ghazni and Badakhshan, both in decision-making and in obtaining jobs. In Kabul the level of activity is very low in comparison, which might be because these women are all still in school. In Faryab women's participation seems to be mostly limited to household dispute resolution.

In Ghazni three of the women even participated in the CDC, although two of them felt that their presence was symbolic and only because it was expected by the government. There are those who feel that their knowledge and experience is not sufficient for participation; "I am illiterate and I don't know how people solve the disputes" (Housewife, 40, Ghazni). But there are also stories from women who have achieved great success in participating at the community level, as one woman from Ghazni describes:

> "We are four women in the CDC and we are all involved in solving disputes in the village. Especially between women, we are effective more than men because we can easily talk with women and make an agreement between both sides. I also participate in many workshops related to conflict resolution. We made different decisions in the village regarding projects for women through the NSP program. We could encourage male members of CDC to involve women. If we were not a member, the bank will not pay this much money to men, it was our influence. I was proud when we get money from bank. We motivated other women also and in next election there is a lot of women want to candidate themselves for CDC" (CDC member, 37, Ghazni).

Half the women in Badakhshan said that they are participating in community decision-making, and that with education and experience they feel confident in their role. However, their answers did not give clear indications for in which institution they participate. Others said women do not have a place in community disputes: "Honestly, in our community women don't participate in bigger issues but in very small like family arguments. Because in our community men are the ones who make decisions. If men, especially my husband allow me, I will participate. The only challenge I see is that our people doesn't have knowledge and awareness, so they don't let us women to be active part in society" (Cleaner, 30, Badakhshan).

In Kabul on the other hand, all the women interviewed has answered "no" to participation in community decision-making, and only two answered that they take part in dispute resolution. One possible explanation might be that these girls are remarkably younger than women from the other provinces (the youngest is only 18), and they are all students, meaning that they have not yet had the opportunity to take part outside the student dorms. Furthermore, as a key respondent pointed out, these girls come from Pashtun communities, which might suggest further restriction on participation in public life.

The interview guide included a question of their level of influence in their participation, however the question did not generate any information about women in leadership roles.

5.4 Obstacles for participation

The women were asked about the main obstacles they are facing as a woman. This question generated a variety of answers. The question is linked to the question regarding reasons for not participating (for those it applies to), which is therefore included in this section. The main obstacles include: cultural and family barriers, male domination, domestic violence, economic challenges, lack of education and knowledge, and overall insecurity. The key informants further supported these findings.

Many women are not allowed to participate, either for lack of permission from their husbands, families or from members of community. As one respondent puts it: "My family doesn't give me permission to participate. We are women and women don't have good ideas. They are just at home. This is the men talking." (Government staff, 52, Faryab). And most women would

indeed like to participate if they got a chance. "I am not allowed to participate. I would, but I am not allowed" (Unemployed, 22, Badakhshan).

From the interviews it becomes evident that many women see gender differences as a major concern for female participation. Most of the women see what they refer to as "bad culture" and lack of permission from society as the main reason for this and it is visible in all provinces. "We are facing lots of cultural barriers if we want to work and take part in the society. Some men believe that women should stay at home and take care of the children. We cannot do what we want to do. In the village everyone knows each other if we do what we want the people will raise their voice to stop us" (Nurse, 22, Ghazni). The key informants also emphasized economic resources as a main limitation. Families might not have the economy to send their girls to school, resulting in a lack of knowledge and skills.

In Faryab, all women referred to cultural barriers as a main issue. Other obstacles include security problems, and the lack of awareness of one's rights. Quite a few of the women pointed to their illiteracy and lack of education as a huge factor of insecurity and thus an obstacle in their lives. Regarding reasons why they do not participate the women refer to the lack of permission, illiteracy and lack of knowledge. One woman also said she does not want to participate.

In Badakhshan, the women said domestic violence, problems with their in-laws, abusive husbands, child marriage, but also lack of permission, not being accepted and get a chance to speak, are the main obstacles. However, there was also one who said that she has not experienced any obstacles. Reasons for not participating include women not being allowed, because men are the ones who make decisions. Again, there was one woman who said she does not want to.

In Ghazni, there is a broader variety of answers. Marriage is seen as a limiting factor for further education, and the unsafe road hinders women in continuing to university. They face lack of permission from family to work, cultural barriers and discrimination, but also bad financial situation, lack of opportunities and jobs. Reasons for not participating is mostly due to illiteracy and lack of skills, and that elders are the ones who should solve disputes. The task division between men and women makes it the responsibility of men. Some also said they do not participate because their participation would be symbolic.

In Kabul, the women refer to cultural barriers and family issues, gender discrimination and lack of equality, and economic issues as the most important. Low level of education, lack of opportunities are also mentioned. Reasons for not participating include lack of permission from family, husband and community, and lack of education and experience. But they also emphasized the fact that they are young and not yet done with their education, and it is thus not suitable to participate in community decision-making.

A summary of the most important obstacles throughout the provinces include:
- Cultural and family barriers
- Discrimination
- Lack of education, knowledge and skills
- Economic constraints
- Domestic violence, both physical violence and forced- and child marriages
- Lack of security

It is also noteworthy that the obstacles mostly coincide with the mentioned security challenges above.

5.5 Discrimination

Nearly 70% of the respondents have experienced discrimination. The respondents were asked about the context when discrimination happened and also how it made them feel. In Faryab, Badakhshan and Ghazni, the experience with discrimination is very high and remarkably higher than in Kabul where only two women said they had experienced discrimination. One of the key informants pointed out the possibility that these girls are still in school and are still protected by their families, and thus might not yet have been in a situation where it occurred due to their young age. All cases throughout Faryab, Badakhshan and Ghazni refers to either education, marriage, work or participation. Also the two cases in Kabul concerns education.

Most of the answers throughout Faryab, Badakhshan and Ghazni are referring to lack of access to education, where family or in-laws have been an obstacle. Many of the women have stories about how their brother was free to choose the education he wanted, while they were not permitted, either for economic reasons or because they had to get married instead. "When I was little my parents had a bad financial situation. So they just send my brother to school, said

you're a girl. Girls do not need to go to school, because, finally they do marry and they don't need to learn" (CDC member, 37, Ghazni).

This takes us to the second issue, that many of these women were not allowed to have a saying in when and who they should marry, and in that way loosing the power over their own future. "When I got married, my family didn't ask me whether I do agree to this marriage or not. But when they wanted to get a wife for my brother they asked him about marriage. I felt hatred for my brother and even my parents. Even cried day and night. I was very upset and worried" (Housewife, 40, Ghazni).

Further, experience with discrimination also applies to lack of access to the labour market and to political participation, or as direct discrimination at the workplace. A 26-year-old shopkeeper in Ghazni said: "When I opened my shop all the community elders come to our home and talk with my husband that it is a shame for a woman working in the bazaar. For a long time, my husband was not agreeing with me to work in the bazaar but now after I showed my ability he is supporting me." It adds to her self-esteem and happiness now that she is able to provide for her family, and buy things needed for her children without having to ask for money. A young woman from Badakhshan explains how she, at work in a government office, was asked by her (male) boss to leave the room just because she is a woman. When asked how it made her feel she replied "How would you feel if your boss (male) insult you in front of people? Obviously it is the worst feeling and painful too."

The respondents hold a lot of frustration and anger because of these experiences, but some women answered that they do no longer think about it because they are so used to it. "When I try to give opinion or to talk I was asked to stop because I am a woman. It was OK for me because I have been used to this kind of situation" (Cleaner, 30, Badakhshan).

Others feel a lack of motivation. As an example: "As I mentioned, we were three women suggesting a tailoring course for women in the village to men but they ignored it and say you don't know." When asked how she felt about it, she said: "It caused that I never participate in such meetings. I feel that if a woman participates in such meetings it's symbolic and it is men that make the decisions in the community" (Housewife, 38, Ghazni).

5.5.1 Symbolic representation

According to a key informant at NAC, women members of CDCs are working on a variety of issues, including: creating job opportunities for women, access to education, clinics, access to clean water, girl's education and reducing girls' drop-out rates, violence against women, women's empowerment issues, livelihood, self help groups, poultry rearing, and kitchen gardening. Unfortunately, according to a key informant, in most of the CDCs women still play a symbolic role and most decisions are still made by the male CDC members. Many of the respondents also claim that their participation and representation is first and foremost symbolic, hence they have no real power of influence. Symbolic representation was later also emphasised as a constraint in women's participation by a participant at the roundtable discussion in Kabul.

Most cases where women participate involve domestic violence within families. These are disputes between mother- and daughter in-laws, between wives and husbands, or cases of divorce. According to a key informant, women rarely participate in formal institutions because the culture does not allow women to participate, although this varies according to differences in cultural practise and level of conservatism in the area. Thus some women are able to participate in court and the human rights department and in solving disputes at both family and community level, while others are not.

5.5.2 Opportunities for the future

Most women believe that women would be able to make contributions to community decision-making and resolving of disputes, however it is emphasized that they must attain education and there is a need for capacity building among men in order to let the women have a voice. When asked about how women can contribute in community decision-making, there is no doubt that they feel that women can play an important part with the right education, training and acceptance from society, as demonstrated by a selection of quotes below:

> "Because I am young I do not have experience. When I finish my education and increase my experience and find ability to know better what is right and what is wrong, I want to help my people and participate" (Student, 19, Kabul)

> "First of all, we need to change the way men think about women so that we can hope to participate and get involved in disputes solving in the community. Secondly, if the men allow the women to participate, again women cannot do it because most are illiterate and need

awareness for social issues. All women and men in the community need a comprehensive dispute resolution training to gain the needed skills about how to solve their disputes in community" (Student, 25, Ghazni)

"There are many women that have skills and knowledge to participate but they cannot because the men don't want" (NGO staff, 56, Faryab)

"If women are trained I am sure women can participate. At the same time the government should work with men in the community because they are not allowing women in their meetings (…)" (Teacher, 24, Ghazni)

5.6 Overall numbers for participation

According to NAC's information, there are 313 CDCs in Jaghori district in Ghazni. These 313 CDCs all contain one female CDC and one male CDC. All CDCs must have female members and in Jaghori this has been implemented to a greater extent than other places in the country. This is also reflected to some extent in the interviews, as the most active women are in Jaghori, although closely followed by Badakhshan. According to a key informant, Jaghori differs significantly from the other districts because of the dominant religion (Shia-Islam) and Hazara culture, and has perhaps the most liberal views on women's participation, but has also high levels of education in the communities. But even so, many still feel that women's participation is primarily symbolic.

In most places in Badakhshan and Faryab, the female CDCs and their members are less active, and there are only a few places with truly active female CDCs. In the two districts of Khawja Sabz posh and Shrin Tagab, where NAC is operating in Faryab, there is a total of 59 and 84 CDCs respectively. These are all male CDCs, but they all have 2-3 female members. In these districts, no women's CDC is yet established. In Badakhshan there are only a few places where you can find an active women's CDC. However, according to NAC's information, there are 4494 female CDC members in the districts where NAC is working in Badakhshan, where there is a total number of 856 CDCs.

According to the key informants, men are the dominant members of traditional shuras. However, only some communities still operate with the traditional shura, which consists of traditional leaders and community elders, and is consulted when the CDC is unable to solve a

dispute. The establishment of the CDCs has provided an opportunity for women to work in the community alongside men, as the traditional shura did not include space for women. There are usually no formal requirements to take part in the CDC. Many male members are even illiterate, according to a key informant. The main requirement is to be a respected person in the community, in order to be elected. This highlights the importance of education and capacity building, both for women and men.

5.7 Human security

Within a human security framework introduced in chapter three, the security challenges encountered in the interviews are most visible as personal, economic, community, political and health insecurities, as demonstrated in the table below.

Table 2 Threats to human security

Personal security	The individual perceptions of fear and everyday threats
	Domestic violence, including forced marriage and child marriage
	Violence against women
	Impact of local warfare
Community security	Cultural barriers
	Lack of enabling environment
	Male domination and oppression of women
	Lack of mobility
Economic security	Poverty
	Lack of basic income
	Inequality in access to resources
	Lack of economic empowerment
	Unemployment
Political security	Lack of access to education
	Lack of information and ability to communicate
	Low level of awareness of rights
	Lack of legal protection
	Discrimination
	Lack of political empowerment

Health security	Lack of access to health clinic and hospital
	Complications during childbirth
	Depression

Based on the interview results

Overall, in all findings, it is important to keep in mind that there might be differences from one community to another, between districts, and between provinces, due to the huge variety in cultural norms, traditional practices and religious beliefs.

Chapter Six

6.   Discussion

This chapter will discuss the research questions in light of the findings from the interviews and previous research on the topic. It will first have a look at the main approaches to gender and security in Afghanistan, before looking at what the literature tells us about security challenges and women's participation. Does the data from the interviews support previous research on the topic? Is there anything new? Is human security and a gender perspective the right approaches to understand and address these issues, and what is the way forward?

6.1 Approaches to gender and security in Afghanistan

First of all, it is important to understand the main approaches that has been taken to the study of gender and security in Afghanistan in order to see to what extent gender and security are westernized concept, or whether they are contextualized and rooted in Afghan culture.

There has been a tendency to view Afghan women as helpless third world women, in need of liberation only by Western powers. In such a narrative one tends to miss the fact that Afghan women are strong and capable, and are themselves agents for change. The problem is when concepts such as development, gender equality, participation, democratization, or women's rights are understood in a Western mind-set and context, it is not paid attention to the meaning of these words in local realities. This should be seen in relation to Aoláin's (2013) argument on inherent patriarchy in international institutions, creating a hierarchy of what challenges to be prioritized. Who are in need of protection and what do they need protection against? Only when we understand the local reality can we achieve progress.

As Rostami-Povey (2007) is pointing out, the focus has been on the overall national structures and policies to achieve gender equality in Afghanistan, such as the setting up of a Ministry for Women's Affairs (MoWA). National government departments together with the broader international community has focused on big words such as development, participation, gender equality and women's rights, while they have not paid enough attention to what is going on at the grass root level. Many Afghan women have thus argued that human rights issues, cultural issues and women's rights issues have been "cosmetically imposed from above" (Rostami-

Povey 2007, p. 65) Instead to Afghan women, women's rights relates to the lack of employment, education, health facilities and food, as well as cultural issues.

When little attention is given to livelihoods, poverty, and insecurity, the constitutional and formal rights of women become less meaningful. Despite all formal rights and legislation that has been achieved, how many women are literate? How many women die in childbirth? (Rostami-Povey 2007). Poverty and dangerous environment are real obstacles to women's participation in all aspects of society. Therefore, overall security and socio-economic conditions must be improved. Structural violence also appears to receive less focus. It is entrenched in the patriarchal social structure in the country, which is oppressing to women and limits their basic right to freedom. There are many examples of women's oppression due to family honour, abuse, forced marriages to settle feuds, and rumours. This in turn highlights the importance of socio-economic development and institution building as a precondition for the real structural change (Rostami-Povey 2007).

There are many strategies for achieving gender equality. An AREU briefing paper (Wakefield & Bauer 2005) emphasizes the need to promote policy and institutional change, increase attention to gender disparities, and increase support for women's networks and include men as partners. This cannot be achieved solely by policies at the national level. Thus, the briefing paper identifies the lack of understanding of local level realities and gender relations as a serious challenge. Kakar (2014) emphasizes the importance of working with religious leaders in a time of political, economic and security transition in Afghanistan. Religious leaders are essential as they have credibility and moral authority among larger parts of the population. Thus, they might be able to influence and challenge traditional gender roles and male domination.

6.1.1 Protection scenarios and embedded feminism

Since 2001, Afghan women have often been portrayed as helpless third world women in need of protection, which coincides with the protection scenarios discussed in chapter three. The best way to achieve inclusion of women is to look at women's own experiences. Feminists take a clear bottom-up approach to security by their focus on telling the stories of how war and insecurities affects the everyday lives of women (Wibben 2011). This approach is challenging the notion that wars are fought to protect the vulnerable population, which traditionally translates to women and children. Liberal feminism has been successful in its arguments for

inclusion of women in political processes, using popular advocacy. But despite the practical success, it has also been criticized for being naïve in its outlook, or having a tendency to an 'add-women-and-stir' tactic. For example, it might result in the fact that women are viewed as symbolic representatives, imposed by the government, as seen in Afghanistan. In other words, even though the legal framework is in place, it does not necessarily mean that women are able to benefit from their rights.

The use of feminist discourse has had its limitations when it comes to Afghanistan. An important contribution here is Krista Hunt's work on embedded feminism (2008), where women are typically portrayed as victims. Many feminists have been sceptical to the USA's use of feminist discourse (Hunt 2008). In Afghanistan, it has been used to support the war on terror rather than addressing the actual needs of Afghan women. By using feminism in this context, conservatives in Afghanistan only increased the resistance against women's rights. It is seen as an attempt, by the West, to undermine their Muslim society (Hunt 2008). Thus, feminist discourse becomes an attack on their culture and religion. Hunt (2008) argues that the Bush administration embedded feminism in the war in Afghanistan to gain public support by portraying the war as a liberation project. Hence, Hunt (2008, p. 53) defines embedded feminism as "the incorporation of feminist discourse and feminist activists into political projects that claim to serve the interests of women but ultimately subordinate and/or subvert that goal." To support her argument, Hunt (2008) points to the lack of interest in Afghan women before 9/11.

6.1.2 Women's place in society

However, it is important to remember not to ignore the hard work of Afghan women. Talking with elders and religious leaders served as a very useful start, but much of the hard work is being done by strong and capable Afghan women, as agents of change. As social actors they have experienced decades of war and violent conflict. They have sought alternative ways for empowerment, for instance through secret schools, networking, and skill-building during the Taliban rule, in order to hinder total disintegration of communities. All this within a context of restricted resources and restrictive cultural practices (Rostami-Povey 2003). Again, in order to break down gender power relations, one must first understand the meaning of gender in the Afghan local context, through a focus on the women's own experiences of daily life.

Moghadam (2002) says, using a feminist lens reveals how throughout 20th century 'women's place' was highly politicized in Afghanistan. It was a central issue in many political conflicts. In 1920s reformers and modernists sought to modernize the country and the society, by improving status of women, and establish an inclusive educational system. In the 1980s there were two opposing movements, namely the Islamic-traditionalist and the Marxist-modernizing, which fought a bloody war, also related to 'women's place and role in society' (Moghadam 2002). Then in the 1990s came the Taliban and created a new level of the social exclusion of women, by putting restrictions not just on their participation in society, but even their visibility. The persistent strict gender roles appear to be both due to the deeply rooted notion of patriarchy to be found in the Afghan society, but also the lack of strong institutions to uphold law enforcement and development imposed by the central government. One might argue that there is a lack of constructive dialogue between the local and national level.

6.2 What are the main security challenges affecting women's ability to participate?

The findings from the interviews have revealed several security challenges, all which have impact on women's ability to participate in conflict resolution, community decision-making and public life in general. Within the human security framework, the thesis argues the main security threats to Afghan women according to the interview results, include poverty, gender-based violence, along with marginalization in society, where the latter includes lack of economic and political empowerment, freedom of mobility and limited access to education. As mentioned in chapter three, all challenges within the human security framework are typically closely linked, one does seldom appear alone. This corresponds with the understanding of human security in the findings, where the threats are mostly linked to each other. The threats are limiting women in fulfilling their potential and achieve their ambitions in life. Furthermore, these threats are also a limiting factor to one of the main goals of human security, namely to empower. Empower the people the be able to look out for themselves and for others. The social exclusion of women in many parts of Afghanistan is a factor slowing down further development for the country, both socially, economically, politically and security-wise. Hence, gender becomes a crucial concept to understanding the various threats experienced by women.

While in the traditional idea the state is the only relevant actor in providing and reinforcing security, there is a broader range of actors in human security. These actors are ranging from the

state, to international or regional organisations, non-governmental organisations and even civil society (CHS 2003). However, human security is not meant to weaken the state, it may very well function as a complementary approach (Benedek 2008). In Afghanistan, state security and human security should be seen as two complementary pillars of national security, being mutually reinforcing. Furthermore, human security requires strong institutions, something Afghanistan is missing.

6.2.2 Lack of secure environment

According to a study by Ayubi (2010) the biggest problems Afghan women are facing are the limited access to education and job opportunities, followed by lack of equal rights and domestic violence. Domestic violence also includes gender-based violence of forced marriages, rape and abuse, and *baad* (the practise of giving away girls for solving family disputes). These issues are all interconnected and will affect each other. Further security threats to Afghan women includes health insecurities, lack of economic and political empowerment, and freedom of mobility. These threats correspond to a large degree with the interview findings.

It is also worth noticing that the impact of conflicts and local warfare can be different for men and women. Women are more exposed to violence, especially sexual violence, during wartime or conflicts. Women's lower social status and the imbalanced gender power relation leaves women more vulnerable socially and economically. Women also face greater risks if they are widowed, as they are often seen as unprotected women (Rostami-Povey 2003). This means they risk being cast out from families and communities. They risk not receiving help from aid agencies as many are not registered and do not possess an official card to receive help. Further, it increases the risk of inter-familial violence. Being widowed would also create further economic challenges, due to traditional norms where women cannot own land, work outside the home, and thus will face a hard time providing for herself and her family. This is also put forward by respondents in the interviews. However, in more traditional parts of the country, widows are often married off to the brother of the deceased, for her own protection and familial obligation (Smith 2009).

In many areas of the country, the conditions for women are hard, and the consequences of all security issues mentioned above are experienced different for women and men. Perhaps the most striking evidence is how women in Afghanistan die at a younger age than men. Despite

the high level of male causalities in armed conflict, men still outnumber women (NAPWA 2007-2017, p. 7).

6.2.3 Lack of education and information

Some women might have a lack of will to participate, either because of security threats or the feeling of being unqualified (Wakefield & Bauer 2005). This lack of confidence among women and the undervaluation of women's skills highly impact women's ability to participate in community decision-making as well as to undertake leadership roles, which would require some level of education, communication skills and access to resources. This is indeed reflected in the interview findings. As most women interviewed see men as the ones who make decisions, they emphasise the lack of education and knowledge they would need in order to participate and gain acceptance. This underlines the importance of focusing on education and training, which will provide women with self-confidence, ability and willingness to contribute in decision-making and conflict resolutions. On the other hand, education must be prioritized for the community as a whole, so that men will learn to see the value of women's skills and contribution.

In 2012, the total number of schools in the country was 14,394, with a total number of 7,861,988 students, whereof 3,013,009 girls (Ganesh 2013). Even though the numbers of girls in primary education is increasing, it is still low in absolute numbers and there is still a lower level of girls' attendance compared to boys'. Ganesh (2013) refers the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) country report, to several main reasons why parents do not send their daughters to school, including distance to school (37,2%), inadequate facilities (25,8%), lack of gender-segregated schools (22%), child labour in domestic chores (17,2%), schooling not being necessary (15%), child labour in paid work (7,1%), teacher's gender (6,4%). As also emphasized by several respondents in this research, they did not get to continue their education due to economical reasons, and when their parents had to choose, they would send the son to school instead. Some respondents also described how their families saw marriage and household chores as more important than education for a girl. Ayubi (2010) highlights discrimination, violence against women, forced marriages and economic problems as obstacles for women's education. Hedayat and Harpviken (2014) also mention marriage at a young age as an obstacle for women to pursue university degrees.

In rural areas, people are more hesitant to send their children to school, and especially girls. Echavez (2012a) points to the often long distances to the nearest school and the insecurities the children might encounter, as main reasons to keep your children at home. However, in all communities in Echavez' research, the general public sees education as an important factor in getting a job. Furthermore, there are high drop-out rates for girls, which refers to a twofold issue. First of all, the lack of girls only schools, secondly, early marriages (Ganesh 2013). This underlines the importance of increasing development for girls' schools, as well as focusing on training female teachers. But it also highlights the importance in combatting traditions of child marriages.

Thus, a lack of education and knowledge will render women powerless, without a voice in decision-makings both outside and inside the home. Furthermore, as many women are unaware of their rights, others will to a great extent be in charge of their lives. In many communities there is a notion of women's knowledge being insufficient to make decisions. It is not just reported by men, but by women themselves (Wakefield & Bauer 2005).

Gendered knowledge
It is common among Afghan men to assume that women do not have any knowledge, which is linked to the social norms around women's participation in public life (Wakefield 2004). Furthermore, this is also a perception among many women, which contributes to paint a picture of women as being inferior to men. It is reflected in notions of the different knowledge held by men and women, which can be a limiting factor for women's participation in both household decisions and community decision making. "The persistence of the rhetoric that women have 'no knowledge', may be an important strategy for those with power to ensure that those without it do not challenge assumptions about appropriate sets of behaviour" (Wakefield 2004, p. 2). Wakefield (2004) refers to these assumptions about knowledge as 'gendered knowledge'.

6.2.4 Economic empowerment
Economic insecurity has often more devastating consequences for women due to the social organization in the community. Women are often facing lack of control over assets, no access to power over resources, and restrictions on working outside the home, hence they become highly dependent on male relatives or husbands. As Staudt (2011) points out, giving women political power is not the only key ingredient to achieve equality. It is also crucial to empower

women economically, in order for them to make their own money and be in control of their savings. This way they are more in control of their own lives, not having to depend completely on their male relatives or husbands. Hedayat and Harpviken (2014) explain how mobility and the permission to work with men are crucial factors for women's participation in the work force. They are essential in order to meet relevant people, build networks and increase access to information.

Combatting cultural barriers is one challenge. But in the current economic climate in Afghanistan, there are relatively few opportunities available. Echavez (2012a) has found that women have no more access to paid work than a decade ago. Despite more positive attitudes towards women working, lack of education and experience keep women uncompetitive for the few job opportunities there are.

Women's economic empowerment in Afghanistan is an integral part of women's rights and local development. Echavez (2012a) notices how women who do work outside the home, experience an increase in mobility, and influence over decisions. Furthermore, being exposed to the outside world through paid work, does increase women's awareness in general. Wimpelmann (2012) points to the need for less aid and more politics in Afghanistan.

6.2.5 Violence

Violence is constraining women's potential. It prevents women from enjoying their human rights and fundamental freedoms. The UN's Declaration on Violence Against Women (1993) defines violence as "any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life." It is therefore understood as all kinds of violence, whether physical, sexual or psychological, occurring within the family or in the community. In this context physical violence (from husband or in-laws) along with forced marriage and child marriage are the dominant forms of domestic violence, as we have seen in the interview results. Forced marriages and child marriages are seen as acts of coercion and deprivation of liberty, it deprives women of their freedom as well as control over their own sexuality.

Violence against women in Afghanistan is widely known, but perhaps not well understood. Violence, whether public or private, is an everyday occurrence to many Afghan women. As

established above, these occurrences might include rape, sexual violence, honour killings, exchange of women in disputes, *baad*, trafficking, abduction, early and forced marriages, threats and attacks. Furthermore, armed conflict results in risk of displacement, destruction of homes and property, reduced or no access to essential services, and risk of being widowed. Violence can appear in different forms. Economic violence would include the women's lack of permission to work outside the home. Social violence, refers to not being able to participate in social gatherings and public activity. As one respondent from Faryab explains, she once had to leave a public celebration where children were singing because there was an objection to women and girls being present. Verbal violence refers to verbal abuse and harassment on the street. This is exemplified by one of the respondents in Kabul saying she is often exposed to people using bad words against her on the street. These types of violence are included in a broader understanding of psychological violence (Global Rights 2008).

Violence against women and girls in Afghanistan is rooted in the county's culture, customs, attitudes and practices (UNAMA & OHCHR 2009). It can be hard for women to escape norms and traditions, which uphold the male domination. The findings of UNAMA and OHCHR (2009) show how women are exposed to an increasingly insecure environment. Those who participate in public life often face threats of violence and attacks. Some have even been killed for holding jobs considered not in line with traditional practice. Such attacks send a clear message to other women that they should stay at home. This creates obvious limitations for further development of Afghanistan. For example, in the socio-economic environment where 42% are living in extreme poverty, "it is unrealistic to anticipate significant advances when one half of the population is denied participation either at the local or national level" (UNAMA & OHCHR 2009).

Afghanistan Public Policy Research Organization (APPRO) (2013) has found that there has been a general increase in violence against women throughout the provinces they researched. As the main causes of violence, their respondents have pointed to poverty, increased unemployment, drug addiction and a lack of awareness about women's rights among men in the community. However, in Badakhshan they noticed there has been a decrease in violence following more awareness in society even though, as the interview findings suggests, violence against women is still a highly important issue in Badakhshan.

Ganesh (2013) has found that gender-based violence has increased throughout all provinces since 2007. Even though much of the information on sexual violence is incomplete due to difficulties of researching the topic, women both in urban and rural areas at risk of sexual violence (UNAMA & OHCHR 2009). Private feuds, between families or communities are also motives for sexual violence. UNAMA and OHCHR's (2009) report points to the practice of solving cases of rape by an arranged marriage between the rapist and his victim. Needless to say, this has severe consequences for a woman and puts them at risk of domestic violence. Furthermore, as men are also forced into marriages, they might take out their frustration by becoming violent (Smith 2009).

The Global Rights report (2008) found that the vast majority of Afghan women experience high levels of violence at home. The report further emphasizes the "endemic" nature of domestic violence, as the findings suggests that it is rarely concerning just a single act rather than being a continuum, pervading all aspects of a woman's life. In turn, this creates limitations in the ability to participate socially. Such high levels of violence at home found in the Global Rights report (2008) indicate the pervasive inequality between men and women in society. Echavez (2012a) has uncovered two main reasons for conflicts between husbands and wives, namely financial problems as a trigger for tensions, and cases of women's 'misconduct.' She also found that it is, not surprisingly, mostly men who threaten and abuse their wives, but that several men said that their wife can also pose a threat by earning more money or being more educated than their husband. This suggests deeply embedded conflicts over perceived gender roles. It might be related to a notion that men who respect women are seen as weak. As Smith (2009) has found, a root cause of family violence is the unequal power relations between men and women.

Violence and the private sphere
Violence against women has almost everywhere been kept out of the public arena (Enloe 2004). This has hindered public officials in tackling such abuse, but even worse it has entrenched the silencing of many of those women who have been targets of that violence. Silencing violence should be seen as a set back for further development, because violence is one of the main causes limiting women's participation the in public sphere, in political processes, which constrains their social opportunities. Enloe (2004) argues that as long as rape, sexual harassment, forced prostitution or domestic violence is denied or trivialized, one cannot achieve real democratization. She further argues that as a researcher, one should be curious about such trivialization. "To overcome the profoundly masculinist culture of political life, we must dare

to take those matters belonging to the 'private discourse' to be debated in public arena" (2004, p. 72-3). One of the most potent mechanisms for political silencing is dichotomizing public and private, and these dichotomies' reliance on myths of femininity, where femininity equals the private. One must fight those who have thought that not only women's concerns but women themselves are most "naturally" kept within the private sphere (Enloe 2004, p. 72-3). This divide between the public and the private is particularly sensitive in Afghanistan, where women's access to the public sphere has been much politicized, and even denied.

Particularly in private spheres, Afghan women and girls face regular, various forms of violence. According to Afghanistan Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (AMICS) (CSO & UNICEF 2012), 92 % of Afghan women have an acceptance of domestic violence. Cases where violence is accepted is generally related to women's inappropriate clothing, not taking permission for leaving the house, or refusal to engage in sexual intercourse. Due to issues of domestic violence being perceived to be resolved within the private sphere, it is hard for law enforcers to tackle the issue.

6.2.6 Lack of legal protection

As visible in the findings, only half of the respondents claim to know about Afghan laws protecting the rights of women. Furthermore, when asked about the law's significance, it becomes clear that to many it has no real value, "It is just some written words. If it had any meaning, I would be able to decide for my life" (Teacher, 22, Badakhshan). Aoláin (2013) notices how even though the legal framework is in place, it cannot serve its purpose if women are afraid to go out. Security is closely related to post-conflict environments and deeply affects women's lives, whether security is absent or present. "As research on women's security highlights, there are numerous obstacles in the post-conflict and transitional political environment to meaningful security for women" (Aoláin 2013, p. 41), making it difficult for women to participate and function in public life, due to the fear of being harmed. Women also experience lack of legal protection. The environment for seeking legal protection has been challenging, and there is still a long way to go to ensure women's access to both formal and informal justice institutions (Calfas 2015).

To ensure women's access to justice has been one of the top priorities for the Ghani administration, but improvements in legal protection is still challenging (Calfas 2015). Afghan

women have generally had limited access to formal justice and studies show that 80% relies on traditional dispute resolution mechanisms (UNAMA & OHCHR 2009). The formal system is often seen as ineffective and corrupt, and in some communities there are still only the traditional justice system. The Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) (2014) found that the traditional justice systems have several flaws. First of all, there is a lack in qualifications and skills among its members. Mullahs and other community leaders do not have the the right training. This in turn results in inconsistent decision-making, meaning that it varies from one community to another. Furthermore, the traditional systems often support harmful traditional practices, which is often detrimental to women. Another important flaw is the risk of corruption in the traditional system, as local power holders, armed presence or a warlord's wealth are key stakeholders. In result, it creates an overall lack of accountability.

APPRO (2013) found that the majority of legal cases involving women concerned domestic disputes. They also found that the important restrictions in terms of women's access to legal justice includes bad attitude against women from justice officials, along with a disapproval by male family members, and the lack of awareness of their own rights.

A problem of using traditional methods of mediation when it comes to domestic violence or other gender-based violence, is that they "defuse claims of justice" (Wimpelmann 2015, p. 101). Wimpelmann (2015) describes how cases of domestic violence are often not reported in fear of family break-ups. As domestic violence is perceived to be resolved within the private sphere, reporting it to the authorities might cause women to be cast out of their family, having no one to support her, which will have severe consequences. Indeed, most interview respondents emphasise the important role of family members and neighbours in solving cases of domestic violence.

The law on Elimination of Violence Against Women (EVAW), is a top-down initiative that does not recognize that many are unable to benefit from it, and the law is thus not able to provide safety and legal help to those who perhaps need it the most. Furthermore, attempts to enforce women's rights, such as EVAW, has also been met with resistance. In 2013, outspoken clerics in Parliament referred to the law as 'un-Islamic' and a foreign project (Kakar 2014). This suggests a need to focus more on local level everyday conflicts, particularly poverty issues. It is a fundamental building block on the way to achieving (lasting) peace and development. Even

though violence against women has been a high priority in promoting women's rights in the post-2001 environment, underlying structural relations for women's exposure to violence has been left unquestioned (Wimpelmann 2015).

6.2.7 Patriarchal social structure

The roots of patriarchal oppression go deep in Afghanistan. The male domination can be traced back to pre-Islamic civilizations, and Islam inherited and reconstituted the social organisation of gender (Rostami-Povey 2007). A common thread, as described in the chapter three, is the status and condition of women. In Afghanistan it is visible in the patriarchal family laws with regard to marriage, divorce, custody of children, forced marriages and honour killings and denial of women's access to healthcare, education and employment are continuing (Rostami-Povey 2007). Women's public visibility has increased since 2001, however, despite major achievements, strong patriarchal societies and cultural constraints creates limitations in women's mobility and participation in public spheres. And access to the public sphere, and equal participation, is a prerequisite for women's empowerment.

Low social status, power, imbalance between men and women, are underlying reasons for harmful and discriminating practices, as well as physical and sexual violence abuse. Responsibility lies with family, but also the community, religious organisations, health education facilities, professionals and law enforcers. The structural violence from society becomes evident in the interviews as a main concern. Most respondents see "cultural issues" as a main obstacle in their lives.

Honour is one of the key elements of patriarchy, and is based on women's behaviour, affecting all members of the extended family (Moghadam 2002). The public and private divide is closely related to the concept of honour, creating implications for female participation, as it challenges traditional gender roles, and therefore the entire social dynamic (Ganesh 2013). In the patriarchal context of Afghanistan, gender becomes a crucial concept to understanding the security threats experienced by women. The entrenched patriarchy creates an environment where only men have access to rights, equality, social opportunities and an overall access to the public sphere.

The research has uncovered the deeply entrenched notions of values associated with masculinity and femininity in Afghanistan. This divide is firmly rooted in the social structure of the society and is visible on several levels. In this research, it perhaps most visible in the level of participation and the arenas of participation for men and women. The divide between the public and the private is built on the notions of the masculine and the feminine, and the values and characteristics they hold. As mentioned in chapter three, the feminine is traditionally associated with values like emotionality, weakness, irrationality. This appears to be visible where many of the women interviewed point to their experiences that men do not take the women seriously. Men do not trust women's abilities. Furthermore, patriarchal societies that subordinate women are likely to do the same to their ethnic and religious minorities (Bernard 2008). Povey argues for a genuine integration engaging all ethnic groups and religions, as the only way to achieve peace, security and development, which in turn can pave the way for change in gender relations (Rostami-Povey 2007).

Deconstruction of masculinity

When studying gender inequalities, it is also important to look at men's roles. Gender, power and control, and violence against women are captivating perspectives on masculinities vis-à-vis gender equality, peace and sustainable development (Pilongo et al. 2016). In Afghanistan, definitions of masculinities and femininities have been passed down from generation to generation. The perceptions of the values embedded in the masculinities and femininities are deeply rooted. This highlights the value of increasing girls' and women's awareness about the roles they can play in re-instating self-esteem and confidence. An AREU report (Pilongo et al 2016) suggests there is a responsibility on men to create a paradigm shift, to challenge each other to break the social acceptance of such 'toxic masculinities.' Gender equality is a prerequisite for overall health and development and thus a driver of the economy.

Returning to Enloe's argument, that upholding a patriarchal social structure requires to some extent acceptance by women, the AREU report by Echavez, Mesawi and Pilango (2016) reveals women's acceptance of deeply rooted gender roles and perceptions of masculinity in Afghanistan, although the study found differences in perception among the rural and urban population, along with ethnic belonging. The deeply rooted gender imbalance became most evident in domestic chores, where the study found a gap between responsibilities of men and women. There is a notion of men as being *nafaqah* providers, meaning that a "man as the husband and father is obliged to provide for all needs of the wife and the children" (Echavez et

al. 2016, p. 19). Examples of the duties that follow is the control over financial subsistence, responsibility for the family's house, children's education and family health. Their study result showed how 80% of 400 respondents are receptive to the principle that men are better leaders than women. While education is known for giving a moderating worldview, overall data in the AREU report (Echavez et al. 2016) suggest that tradition and culture has a much stronger influence. However, the study reveals that females with higher education are less likely to accept men as breadwinners.

Even though there are more female participants in both national and local governance, men appear to have the last word in decisions and discrimination persists. For example, as one of the interview respondents answered to her experience of discrimination; at work in government office, there are times her boss asks her to leave in front of people, because she is a woman. However, male domination is only one piece of the puzzle. Beneath it there is a vast variety of threats to human security affecting women's ability to participate. A lack of secure environment, together with the fear for personal safety in form of violence, lack of access to informational and knowledge, and permeating traditional gender norms, have been detrimental to women and limited their ability to participate in conflict resolution, decision-making, and public life in general. These are all threats that need to be eliminated before one can achieve further development in the status of women.

There has been an unacceptable silence regarding discrimination and violence against women (Echavez et al. 2016), and many women's acceptance of masculinity-based culture of violence further supports this. Silence can be a form of consent. While men are part of the problem, they are also part of the solution. In line with the arguments mentioned above, there is a need for a deconstruction of masculinity, in order to further enhance women's participation.

6.3 What are the most important conflicts in the local community?

In Afghanistan, local conflicts are of major concern to most rural citizens. Local conflicts are often associated with key issues for the local community members, namely land and water (Christian & Idrees 2009). These issues are followed by conflicts concerning financial disputes, debt, marriage and divorce, and domestic violence. Such local conflicts are thus linked to several social, cultural, economic and security factors. Being able to solve conflicts in a non-violent and equitable manner is also of great concern (Christian & Idrees 2009).

According to the results from the interviews, conflicts related to 'land' are the most important conflicts throughout all provinces. Domestic violence comes second, and is by far the most important in Faryab and Badakhshan, while among the students from Kabul it is not considered among the important community conflicts. The importance of conflicts related to land and domestic violence is thus in support of the research previously conducted by Christian and Idrees (2009).

The interview results show that the women generally see the local shura or CDC, and religious leaders and community elders as the main actors in solving community disputes. However, when the dispute concerns family affairs, usually the family members solve it, although in some cases it is necessary for neighbours or community leaders to interfere. Women as actors in peace and reconciliation should be included in dialogue and negotiations, which will make it more likely to achieve a durable peace solution. But what access do women have to participate? What are the challenges they encounter, and what has been achieved so far?

6.4 How are women participating in local conflict resolution?

In rural Afghanistan, women were traditionally not permitted to take actively part in the public sphere. Such norms have in many areas rendered local governance a male-dominated activity. In order to understand how women are participating, one must investigate how community disputes are solved, and how household decisions are made, and men and women's roles respectively. Even though there have been important achievements at the policy levels, to many women these achievements are mostly rhetorical (Wakefield 2004). This is mainly due to the emphasis put on the concerns of urban, educated women, who lives in a different reality than rural women (Wakefield 2004).

6.4.1 Participation in Community Development Councils

The National Solidarity Programme was established to enhance community driven development projects, and also to increase women's participation. Half of the seats to the CDCs are allocated to women, and the CDC is seen as a good arena for women to raise issues and participate in development projects. The effects of the community driven development programmes have been evaluated through the NSP Implementation Evaluation (Beath et al. 2013), with an end-line evaluation at the end of 2011. The evaluation has shown that there has been an increase in access to services, including education, health care and counselling services

for women increases. The NSP has had an impact on the economic perceptions and optimism of villagers, and particularly women. The evaluation found that female villagers have improved perceptions of the current economic situation and are more optimistic about the future changes in local economy. These positive economic perceptions are demonstrated by the broader improvements brought to women's lives by female participation in the CDCs (Beath et al. 2013).

Furthermore, the creation of CDCs more than doubles the number of local assemblies that contain at least one female member (Beath et al. 2013), and there is some evidence that the NSP has made villagers happier, and in particular there were weak evidence of a reduction in the proportion of women reporting that they are unhappy. Which might be a result of increased female participation and access to counselling and basic services. More importantly, the NSP Impact Evaluation (NSP-IE) found that NSP increases men's acceptance of female participation in political activity and local governance, as it causes a 22 % increase in acceptance of female membership in village councils (Beath et al. 2013). Although, the NSP appears to have limited impact on reducing cultural constraints limiting women's opportunities for education. The evaluation further found that the NSP reduced cultural constraints to participation of women in local governance (Beath et al. 2013) A 21 % increase is observed in the participation of women in dispute mediation between 2007 and 2011. (Beath et al. 2013). Data suggests female and male agree that the NSP increases female participation on mediation generally (Beath et al. 2013).

6.4.2 Disputes and decision-making

The results from this research suggest that there is limited access for women to participate in community decision-making in general. However, more than 40 % of interview respondents claim to play a part in mediation in disputes within the domestic sphere. Types of decisions or disputes they are expected to participate in will depend local level gender roles, which will vary according to households (Wakefield 2004). This means that the experiences of women in one village are likely to be different than those of women from another village, which is also supported by the interview findings.

The women interviewed have a higher level of participation in disputes regarding the domestic sphere. This is also found by Wakefield (2004). Again, experience is an enabling factor for participation in settling private feuds, along with age and how many years you have been

married. Wakefield (2004) points to how unmarried women, and without children, are perceived to have less experience in life, and is therefore a constraint for younger women's involvement in community and household decisions. Furthermore, younger women generally have more household chores, which might also get in the way of participating in community life. The interview results in this research further suggest that education and work experience are enabling factors when it comes to participation in the local decision-making institutions as the CDC.

6.4.3 Women's CDC

In many areas the CDC is constituted of two separate institutions, one male CDC and one women's CDC, also referred to as sub-CDC (Nixon 2008). The participation of women in these sub-CDCs are often limited to sub-projects related to women's issues, or it is facilitated through family go-betweens with the male council (Nixon 2008).

Echavez (2012b) researched whether women's participation in the National Solidarity Program made any difference in their lives. In Kabul she found that women's CDC helped provide venues for discussion as well as being a good starting point for female leadership in the community. As also suggested by respondents in this research, interaction with other women improved awareness on various community issues. Women's CDC could also be seen as a boost to self-confidence as many women started to value their own ideas and opinions as being equally important as men's (Echavez 2012b). However, two separate CDCs might lead to no mechanism for ensuring that women's voices are heard (Echavez 2012b). Further, men's CDC is typically in charge of the financial affairs of the women's CDC. Bernard (2008, p. 31) argues that "parallel female and male decision-making should be eroded. Instead, women should be integrated into previously all-male structures, and gender-segregated solutions should at least be transitional." This to avoid the 'add women and stir', but instead reach a change of mentality through changing the ways of thinking and being, which can only by achieved through a bottom-up approach.

Echavez found that overall, the NSP brought increase in knowledge and awareness to both men and women in the communities. Being part of a CDC gave women more freedom of mobility and increased social interaction. Women reported having increased self-esteem, feeling their silence had been broken, and men's perception of women is changing. This is also suggested by some of those women interviewed in this research who do participate in community level

decision-making. However, it is not universal. Echavez found that many younger women reported that men still keep to old traditions and and attitudes of male dominance (2012b).

6.4.4 Leadership

There appears to be limited opportunities for women leaders. Even though women are gaining more space in politics, business and civil society, space for women in leadership roles is not keeping pace (Nijat & Murtazashvili 2015). Women's restricted mobility is a major challenge. They cannot travel around villages and districts like men can, as it is generally perceived as not suitable for a woman to travel around, combined with the limiting issue of being dependent on travelling with mahram, a male chaperone.

In the interview results, women's participation was highest among respondents from Ghazni and Badakhshan. As found by NAC (2016), women in Badakhshan are less actively involved in development projects and CDC decision-making processes than in Ghazni. Women in Badakhshan appear to be less aware of their roles, have restricted mobility and limited access to participation. As established in the findings, there are very few active women's CDCs in Badakhshan, which further suggests a limited access to leadership roles. In Ghazni on the other hand, in the district of Jaghori, all CDCs are composed of one male and one female CDC, which creates an arena for both female participation, but also leadership. APPRO (2013) also found that women's participation in leadership in Badakhshan is limited. The number of female representatives to the Provincial Council is only three, and out of 26 members in the Provincial Peace Council only two are female. Furthermore, interviewees for the APPRO report (2013) also emphasized how women play important roles in the domestic sphere by ensuring unity within the family, which is crucial for peace in society.

6.4.5 The public and the private

The distinction between the public and the private spheres was first introduced by feminist anthropology in the early 1970s (Moghadam 2002). One the one hand, it is a powerful tool for men to keep women in their place, and in other words increase their control over women. One the other hand, it is also a way for men to keep control over means of production. These deeply segregated gender roles constitutes a major limitation for women, as it causes unequal power, and exclusion of women. Thus, men do not only have control over their wives and female relatives, but men can exercise power over women as a social group (Moghadam 2002).

A study conducted by the Peace Training and Research Organization (PTRO) (2014) found that women's participation is highly limited across all provinces, however, it did vary from one area to another. Those who participated faced structural challenges when raising their voices or raising and issue. And in many communities, women did not get opportunities for having a role outside the home. PTRO (2014) further found that the level of female participation in many areas was closely linked to the security situation, as it creates restrictions of movement and thus lack of permission.

The majority of women in the PTRO (2014) report emphasized the role within the home, where they take part in conflict resolution and mediation. These are conflicts that should be solved privately without the involvement of public institutions or respected community leaders, and includes typically disputes over marriage and divorce, dowries and domestic violence (PTRO 2014). The report focuses on two barriers for participation, namely a social barrier and a female capacity barrier. The former includes the negative social ideas around female participation and the lack of awareness of women's rights in community, as well as the strictly cultural restrictions for participation. The latter refers to the lack of capacity in terms of education, and women's lack of knowledge of their own rights. As suggested by interview respondents in this research, women play an increasingly influential role in family affairs. Women can have more influence through more respect from male relatives or from society. For instance, an educated young girl, who has recently been employed, might have a stronger voice in the household economy.

Women's participation is not fully acknowledged and valued in Afghan society. Women in the UNAMA and OHCHR report (2009) said they avoid movements and participation in public spheres due to the fear for their security. Their contribution to society thus gets extremely limited, as they are unable to meaningfully participate in decisions that affect their and their families' lives. Gender perceptions also affect women's capacity to play their role when they are not taken seriously by male counterparts.

It is important to understand the public and private spheres, and that women can hold great power and influence within the family. One must therefore be careful not to generalize to Westernized ideals of participation and social behaviour of women. The fact that they themselves feel and perceive themselves to be participating and contributing. Again, this is

participating in their own terms, and not an external understanding of the meaning of participation in community disputes and decision-making.

6.4.6 School management shuras

Recently, there has been a greater focus on women's participation in school shuras. A school shura is a council of elders, teachers, parents and community members, working with school management and education. The Ministry of Education (MoE) (2015) has through its Education Quality Improvement Program (EQUIP) published an interesting pilot study in this regard, looking at female participation in school management shuras in 18 government schools in Kabul city.

School management shuras has been made up primarily of men (MoE 2015). Recently there has been a greater space for women. In the EQUIP research, in the boys' schools 90 % of discussions were dominated by men, in girls' schools they were equally divided between men and women, and in mixed schools 79 % were dominated by men. However, this research was conducted in Kabul city, which is more liberal, and participation in rural areas is thus likely to be more limited (MoE 2015). Indeed, as mentioned by participants at the roundtable discussion, school shuras rarely have female members, even if it is a girls' school. The female respondents in MoE's (2015) pilot study said they primarily participate in decision regarding greenery, preparation of exams, cleaning, and supporting students. They did however say that they often remain silent, as the decisions the men make are the same as they would have wanted.

Even though women's participation is still limited and sometimes symbolic, the study shows that the school management shuras could be an excellent entry point for women's participation in community decision-making and conflict resolutions. Another important aspect of school shuras it that they can provide teacher training especially for women, as there is a lack of female teachers in the country. A lack of female teachers is in turn a problem for female students, as girls turning 12 or 13 (reaching puberty) can no longer have a male teacher, which would typically be perceived as forbidden.

6.4.7 Symbolic participation

When it comes to participation at the national level, it has been argued that the quota system was a good start, but is now also a limiting factor. It is generally perceived as a ceiling rather

than a floor (Sharan & Wimpelmann 2014), and therefore a form of positive discrimination. Instead of being recruited by quotas, women argue they should be able to reach their positions based on their own power and qualifications. This appears to be reflected in the answers from the interviews, as many women feel that their participation is highly symbolic. A 25-year-old midwife from Ghazni explains:

> "I participated in some decision making meeting conducted by the shura in the village but as I reflect, I as a woman and young person couldn't influence on the decisions made by shura. Our participation was because of the government plan that advised for participation of some women in the meeting to design the projects for the community."

It is further supported by women at the roundtable discussion in Kabul, who emphasized women's symbolic role, and how it is keeping women from speaking their mind. Therefore, it can be considered a limitation that women are perceived as quota holders rather than being valued for their skills. Furthermore, there has been tendencies to link women's participation with promoting women's interests and rights (Sharan & Wimpelmann 2014), thus excluding women from policies regarding what is thought of as male domains.

6.4.8 Obstacles to participation

Women's experience of obstacles depends highly on the family and the community where they are based. Many families do not allow women activities outside the home due to risk for the family safety. Thus, support from husband and family is a pre-condition (UNAMA & OHCHR 2009). Conservative religious thinking is also used to reinforce gender perceptions that limit the ability of women to perform a role within society. Afghan society perceives women to be the guardians of culture and the custodian of the family's honour, and perhaps the most suppressive factor when it comes to women's freedom is cultural practice.

Female mobility is restricted, and generally requires a mahram, a male relative as escort. The practise of using a mahram might also create further restrictions for women, as it might be a limit for participation in public life and having a job when you need to be accompanied at all times. The use of mahram is a widespread practise. As illustrated by the interviews, most women at all times travel with a mahram, except the women from the district of Jaghori. The issue of mahram is something which is also much confirmed by female participants at the roundtable discussion. Furthermore, there is a social stigmatisation of women working with

men. APPRO (2013) found that perceptions of women working outside the home has been positive, as long as women dress appropriately. All the communities researched by APPRO were approving of women working in health and education sector, although, many were reluctant to women working for international NGOs as it could mean having to share workspace with men.

6.5 The way forward

It becomes clear that the threats put forward by human security uncovered above, like the lack of equal opportunity, education and domestic violence. These are profound issues that would require long term strategic approaches for achieving development and protect everyone's human rights, including the establishments of strong institutions, and it takes time.

An AREU report (Pilongi et al. 2016) emphasize the need to open a judicial debate on Islamic notions of social justice that forefront women's interests. It becomes evident that a feminist perspective of gender power relations is necessary, due to the need to deconstruct the belittling of women embedded in Afghan masculinities. In order to do so, involving local key actors in the process of changing values and male gender norms in the traditional structure of Afghan communities can be valuable. These actors include the most influential community leaders and elders, teachers, and other institutions capable of influencing decisions. It could also be fruitful to include young men and women as role models. Kakar (2014) puts forward two major important factors for success in women's rights, namely to include religious leaders as partners with a sense of ownership in the projects, as well as providing better information to religious leaders about women's rights, preferably within an Islamic moral framework (Kakar 2014).

Education

Education is a key factor moving forward. It will decrease cultural barriers, create awareness of people's rights, give people the skills and knowledge to enhance public participation and employment. Community leaders should encourage education for all citizens. As religious teachings are often taken at face value, many people listen to what the religious leader says because they are illiterate. If one can work with the religious leaders it might help change the perceptions of the locals. For example, if the village Mullah tells all villagers it is important that they send their daughters to school, more girls would perhaps be continuing their education.

Using successful, influential women in the community might have a positive effect on motivating female students. Involving the greater community with all institutions to advocate for education and participation can also be a useful strategy. However, it is important to keep an approach adapted to the cultural environment, an approach sensitive to the local culture and which can work through an Islamic perspective.

The issue of education seems to be a complex one. Lack of education among women in the community can be due to cultural or familial reasons, for security reasons, but it can also be for economical reasons. A key informant explained that a government educational institution is easier because the government can provide accommodation. When the institutions are private they charge fees, plus it is a big issue to find a place for the girl to live especially when there are no relatives in the area. It can also be an issue for the girl to stay alone, even if it is in a student hostel. Nor can the girl travel back and forth between home and the institution daily as it might be a very far and insecure journey.

The UN Security Resolution 1325 includes 4 pillars, namely protection, participation, prevention, and relief and recovery. When talking about protection, it is not only directed at protecting women from violent conflict. The National Action Plan (2015-2022) also emphasizes protection of women from everyday violence. One of the prerequisites to achieve this is indeed education. From looking at the findings in this research, education is among the main obstacles and main security challenges affecting women. Education should therefore be a top priority for successful implementation of the action plan.

Independence

Access to income generating activities or economic resources is an important factor for women to gain independence and greater space within the household. If a woman has her own income she will become more independent, which in turn will give her more freedom and power to decide for her own life. The research further suggests that being able to have a job will boost self-esteem and confidence among women. It is crucial to "Not just introduce programs to make women more productive in what they already do, but increase opportunities, including access to loans, move into other parts of the economy" (Bernard 2008, p. 30). Thus, a continued focus on income generating activity is essential.

Increasing level of influence

As understood from the the respondents and additional comments from key informants, most decisions and issues to be raised by women at local level go through male members of the CDC first. This might highlight Bernard's argument that one should not create separate, parallel institutions for men and women, instead one should focus on the importance of integrating, not just adding, women into the existing structure. Although, this might be hard to achieve in practise.

As demonstrated by the findings, higher levels of education and work experience are enabling factors for participation, and for gaining respect and acceptance. Respect and acceptance are, in turn, prerequisites for having influence in decision-making. The government must therefore continue to implement sustainable gender-balanced programs for decision-making. The gender hierarchy must be broken down, both at the national and at the local level. As established in the findings on women's experience in decision-making and conflict resolution, that many feel their voices are not heard, nor are they able to exercise power. This suggests that even though numbers for women's participation are increasing, and there is an equal share of men and women in an office, it is not reflected in the distribution of power. In other words, an equal number of members does not mean there is equality.

Nevertheless, one must not forget that there have been major achievements over the past years, especially regarding education. Such achievements are important because it changes how women see themselves and how they look at the future. As demonstrated by the interviews there is a strong willingness to learn among the women, and an eager to be respected for their skills. As mentioned by participants at the roundtable discussion, many young men today looking for a spouse, are looking for educated girls, which is suggesting a positive change of mentality.

Positive trends

It is important to acknowledge the positive development on this issues of women's security and participation in Afghanistan. Throughout the past decade there has been a positive change of mentality. There has been an increase in working women, whether as shopkeepers, restaurants owners, teachers, or in health sector, and there is a larger number of women in government institutions. Among the positive changes are also several government-led initiatives to improve governance, reduce poverty, and address the wrongs which have kept Afghanistan among the bottom countries in the Gender Inequality Index (UNDP 2015). This in turn has provided a set

of new role models for younger women to look up to, and can be a source of motivation for the younger generation.

While the country is moving forward, there are still many obstacles to overcome. UNAMA & OHCHR (2009) highlights the continued importance of raising awareness in society about (women's) rights, gender discrimination, and violence, as well as strengthen capacity of law enforcement, ensure women are part of decision-making processes affecting not only women and their families, but the society as a whole. "To be silent is to abandon women who are conscientiously taking risks to play an active role in their communities and in Afghan society to advance the rights of women" (UNAMA & OHCHR 2009, p. 30).

As argued by Bernard (2008, p. 34), "A process of nation-building will naturally cause some contradictions between the pre-existing and newly created social systems." For example, the contradiction between Islamic law and promotion of global human rights. The Afghan constitution favours both. Top-down initiative to modernize Afghanistan has traditionally been hard to achieve (Bernard 2008). Thus, it is crucial to include a bottom-up approach to women's advancement, by engaging the lower levels of society.

Are human security and gender perspectives the right approaches to tackle the issues?
Human security is needed to identify threats facing Afghan women, as well as to look for new threats. It should include all that is personally perceived as a threat or insecurity by the individual, which might vary from one person to another, or one village to another. All this is to achieve the goal of human security, namely to be able to live your life safely, in a safe environment where you are able to participate in political processes, have social opportunities, and fulfil your human potential, without discrimination. However, in addition to this human security framework, it is crucial to include a gender perspective. It is crucial because of the deeply rooted gender power relations in patriarchal Afghanistan, and the dichotomies masculinity and femininity with the values associated with each. A feminist gender approach will make the everyday lives of women visible. Human security helps identify and place women's stories within a security framework. Feminism will uncover what insecurities individual Afghan women are facing, and seek to see it through gender lenses. Deeply integrated gender perspectives can create better security outcomes for the entire community (Aoláin 2014), as women are needed for a more stable security discourse.

It is necessary to treat all threats to human security on the same basis as conventional insecurities. To many Afghan women, the real insecurity is not only threats from violent conflict, it is the lack of access to food, basic health facilities, having a steady income and providing for their families. For some, the real insecurity might not be the lack of political engagement, but violence at home, restrictions from their husbands and their own illiteracy. When looking at security through this perspective, one must also see how the notions of masculinity and femininity shape gender hierarchies and power relations. The notions deeply permeate the social structure, which makes it hard for women to overcome. It is therefore crucial to investigate the meaning of gender in the Afghan context, to see how it affects all parts of women's lives.

6.5.1 Limitations and future research

The questions asked in the interviews did not generate the level of details regarding participation at community level as anticipated and hoped. Most importantly, it did not generate detailed data on the arenas where women participate outside the domestic sphere. On the other side, that led to the important understanding of the public and private divide of conflict resolution, realizing that the private part of conflict resolution constitutes an equally important part of community disputes.

The interviews did not provide details on what constitutes the different types of disputes, which was based on pre-made answers of land, money, water, marriage/divorce, armed conflict or domestic violence. Asking more detailed questions regarding the disputes would have provided the research with better understanding of conflicts at the local level. Despite this limitation, the results nevertheless appear sufficient for the scope of this research. Furthermore, there could be other arenas than the CDCs where the women might have influence and participate, which has not been mentioned in the interviews. The interview guide could therefore have asked directly about CDC, school shuras, women's groups or cooperatives, other development projects and family, in order to generate more details on arenas for participation.

For a true gender analysis, one must focus on the perspectives of both men and women. The research could therefore have had a greater focus on men's perceptions about women's participation, to include their point of view.

It becomes clear that more data is needed on female participation in the CDCs; what kind of conflicts and decisions are they able to influence? What issues are women participating in? What are the role of women's CDCs compared to the men's CDCs? There should also be a focus on locating new arenas where women can participate and play influential roles at the local level. Thus, a greater focus on the meaning of the concept of participation is also needed in further research on the topic.

7.   Conclusion

This thesis introduced the human security framework in juxtaposition with feminist theories of gender and security, and it has argued for a bottom-up approach to security. Further, the thesis has presented the findings from 32 individual interviews with Afghan women, conducted in October 2016. In light of these findings the thesis has discussed the main security challenges affecting the women's ability to participate in local conflict resolution and decision-making, what the most important conflicts in the communities are, as well as how women are participating in solving them. It becomes evident that security, in all forms discussed in this thesis, is a precondition for full and meaningful participation for Afghan women.

Human security is understood as ensuring the security of people against threats to human dignity. Human security provides a suitable framework for identifying security threats of all kinds, but it is also important in making the links between the threats visible. These links show us the necessity of addressing all security threats, because when one threat is ignored it might re-emerge as another threat. For example, if the issue of child marriages is neglected, it might create a lack of educational opportunities, which in turn might result in economic insecurity. Hence, not addressing security as a broad concept will only create shallow gains. However, in Afghanistan, a human security framework alone is not sufficient, it must also include a gender perspective.

As established above, the security challenges are complex and include a variety of linked issues. Gender inequalities permeate societal behaviour, and thus appear in most situations throughout all provinces researched. Deeply entrenched in culture and society, this is a profound challenge hard to overcome. It ranges from a lack of education, domestic violence, discrimination, physical security threats, cultural barriers, and lack of financial resources – the consequences of which include a lack of social opportunity and limited public participation, above all in politics and decision-making. Although many legal frameworks are in place, protecting the rights of women and giving women opportunities at the same level as men; this does not mean that women are able to benefit from it. In the views of one respondent, laws protecting women's rights are just pieces of paper and has no real value in her life. Therefore, it is essential to achieve human security in its broadest sense, only then can women be able to fully participate in society. Existing legal frameworks and top-down initiatives to assist women will face

constraints if the women themselves are afraid to leave the house and participate in the public sphere.

Throughout the thesis, it becomes clear that the concepts of masculinity and patriarchy matters when doing a gendered analysis of Afghan communities. It is necessary to make the lives of women, and of men, visible in order to understand their roles in society and how they are affected by conflict and insecurity. A feminist approach is helpful when seeking to address gender hierarchies, power relations, and understand its impact on women.

As feminists have pointed out several times, femininity is associated with the private, while masculinity with the public. This results in a perception that women belong in the domestic sphere, while the public sphere belongs to men. This is typical of strong patriarchal societies like Afghanistan, and became apparent in the answers provided by the interviews with 32 Afghan rural women. The result reflects the deeply rooted gender roles, where men take responsibility and decisions in the public sphere, while women maintain a visible control in the domestic environment. However, that does not mean that women are excluded from all decisions and conflict resolution, as many of the most important conflicts unfold in the private sphere, between members of the extended family and neighbours. Here women play an important role as mediators, advisers and decision-makers, and their level of influence increases with experience and age.

While women take greater part in politics and there is a genuine interest in formulating legislation on women's rights, institutional and political change might not be enough. It must also be appreciated and accepted by local communities. Hence a need exists for a more bottom-up approach, which will create a broader sense of ownership for the local women. In other words, in the political and social construction of the state, one needs to pursue sustainable change in traditional gender hierarchies starting from the individual moving upwards.

Although there has been great focus on women's participation in national politics and government institutions, less analysis has been undertaken on actual participation models at the local level. This will need to be addressed in order for national policies to be fully meaningful at the village level. In this regard, the thesis would like to point to the necessity of further research on key drivers providing opportunities and constraints to women's participation at the local level. In addition, more research is needed on the level of female participation, not just in

CDCs, but also in other arenas where they are able to raise issues and influence outcomes. Further research should be done on what sort of conflicts and decisions women have been able to influence, and the role of women's CDCs.

There are several reasons for staying positive, there have been a lot of achievements; including increased education for girls, increased employment, increased participation, and for some, more freedom to make decisions in their own lives. The goal for women's rights in Afghanistan should include both a reference to traditional rights and the inclusion of contemporary global standards of human rights and gender equality. There is a tendency to neglect the importance of women in conflict resolution and mediation; it is not a question of whether, but of *how* to increase women's participation in conflict resolution.

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Appendix 1

Interview guide

Ask for informed consent to conduct the interview and use the data for research purposes.
Assure participants of their anonymity.

Status
- Age?
- Education?
- Married/not married?
- Number of children?
- Part of any organisation?
  - If yes, which?

Security
- Have you ever been afraid?

Always	Often	Seldom	Never

 - Who or what are you afraid of?

- Who or what are people most afraid of in the community?
- Have you ever experienced violence in the community?
  - If yes, what happened?
- If someone in the community is victim of violence, is there anyone they can go to for help?
  - If yes, who would that be?

	YES	NO
Police		
Local shura		
Family		
Teacher/school		
Health services		
Religious leader		
Wife of religious leader		
Other_____		

- What would you need from your community in order for you to feel safer?

- Do you feel safe when travelling between your home and your school/other places?
  - Do you travel by yourself or with a mahram?
- If you go to the market, do you go alone or do you go with a family member?
- Do you know about any Afghan laws protecting the rights of women?
  - If yes, which law(s)?
  - If yes, what does the law(s) mean to you?
  - Is there a right you wish you had as a woman?
- What obstacles are limiting you as a young woman?

Participation

- What are the most important disputes in your community?

	Very important	Important	Less important	Not important	Not relevant
Money					
Land					
Water					
Marriage/divorce					
Armed conflict					
Domestic violence					
Other _____					

- Who solves community disputes now?
- Do you participate in solving disputes?
  - If yes, how do you participate?
  - If no, why do you not participate?
- How can women contribute in solving community disputes?

- Do you participate in community decision-making?
  - If yes, what is your level of influence?
  - If yes, do you feel confident in your role?
  - If no, why do you not participate?
  - If no, would you like to participate?
- Are there any obstacles for women's participation in community decision-making?

- Have you ever felt discriminated against (because you are a woman)?
  - If yes, can you give some examples of when it happened?
  - If yes, how did it make you feel?

Wrap-up
- What are the three most important security challenges that affects your life?
- What are the three most important security challenges that affects your ability to participate?
- What are the main consequences of the security challenges you are describing?