The Home Front

The Role of Women in Afghanistan's Peace and Reintegration Programme

PTRO Research Paper, March 2014

Reintegration of former insurgents into communities is a key element of the Afghan Peace and Reintegration Programme (APRP), and creating a stable and peaceful future for the country. The role of women in this process is, however, widely neglected. Ensuring that women participate in and contribute to these reintegration activities is key in avoiding conflict recidivism in many areas of Afghanistan.

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Peace Training and Research Organisation

About PTRO and Acknowledgements

The Peace Training and Research Organization (PTRO) is an Afghan NGO based in Kabul, which focusses on peace, conflict, and justice issues, and provides training in peacebuilding and good governance. PTRO also conducts research for national and international governmental organisations, NGOs, and national bodies, to inform policy and provide a deeper understanding of relevant issues.

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PTRO allows the dissemination of this report and use of research findings with proper accreditation.

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Executive Summary

This research, conducted over the course of one year by the Peace Training and Research Organisation, looks at the role of Afghanistan's women in the Afghan Peace and Reintegration Process (APRP). The primary goal of the research was to establish the role currently played by women in the APRP, reintegration activities, and community decision making in general. The research also looked more broadly at the effectiveness of the APRP, opinions of those involved in it (including reintegrees) and what Afghans at the local level – both male and female – feel can be done to make the process more effective in the future.

The research finds that communities throughout Afghanistan take very different views of the APRP, and that the impact of the programme differs widely across the country. In many areas the APRP is welcomed and serves to strengthen security and community solidarity; in others its impact is unclear, and its reception by community members less positive.

The paper highlights the complex linkages at the community level between reintegration, security, and local economies, and the ways these interact with female participation in the APRP and community life more generally. Despite an increasingly public role in recent years, the role of women in Afghan communities remains largely confined to the domestic sphere. Within families, the support of women in encouraging and assisting insurgents in reintegration is essential to the success of the programme. The often ignored role of informal women's networks in providing support and advice to the families of reintegrees is also recognised.

In addition to supporting women, the paper also highlights a number of steps that must be taken to ensure the success of the programme and assist it in meeting its goals, and in supporting wider goals of sustainable peace in communities throughout Afghanistan. These include stricter oversight of reintegrees, countering perceptions of corruption and nepotism, and expansion of Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan (GIRoA) and NGO services into newly accessible areas.

Principle Recommendations

The results of the research suggest a number of recommendations for the international community, national civil society organisations, and Government of Afghanistan, including:

International Donors and Policy Makers

o Greater alignment between the objectives of development interventions and reintegration: Closer coordination between development initiatives aimed at stimulating local economies, and reintegration activities, could help in reducing conflict recidivism.

o Female-targeted interventions: More interventions specifically targeted at females must be planned, to enhance the ability of women to contribute to the success of reintegration activities.

o Develop a greater understanding of the mechanisms of reintegration: A better understanding of the drivers of reintegration would help the APRP to target its messages and incentives more effectively.

The United Nations

o Ensure closer oversight of the process: Monitoring and evaluation mechanisms at the local level can help to counter perceptions of corruption and nepotism within the APRP in certain communities.

o Ensure gender mainstreaming is prominent in the process: Although funds and provisions for gender mainstreaming within the APRP do exist, these should be more widely capitalised on to enhance the role of women in the process.

National and International NGO Community

o Extension of services: NGOs should capitalise on extended access that emerges in areas in which reintegration takes place to implement economic interventions such as vocational training.

o Continue to work with women in communities: Training and mentoring of female groups should continue, as well as establishing networks and outreach work to ensure that the families of insurgents and reintegrees have the support they need to assist reintegrees through the process and ensure that recidivism does not take place.

The Government of Afghanistan

o More rigorous vetting procedures: Closer attention must be paid to those reintegrating, and vetting procedures must be clearly outlined and rigorously implemented to ensure that armed civilians and local militia groups are not included in the reintegration process.

o Emphasise an Afghan-led process: Emphasise that the process is Afghan led and place it more centrally within a strong programme of state-building activities.

o Build public trust: Attempt to build greater trust in the GIRoA on the part of reintegrees and potential reintegrees. Perceptions that the APRP is dogged with corruption and nepotism in certain areas undermine the credibility and legitimacy of the process, as well as alienating certain groups and individuals. The GIRoA should also quickly extend government services – such as rule of law and basic infrastructure – into areas which have become safer with reintegration activities, as well as extending the provision of government services and grievance resolution mechanisms to reintegrees can help in breaking the existent ties between members of armed groups.

o Build female capacity: The capacity of women at the local level must improve to allow a greater role in the APRP. This paper highlights a number of important roles played by women which must be built upon.

o Dissemination of information: Improved information feeds, both downwards to the local level (through media and other others channels), and outwards to the international community, can improve participation in and programming around the APRP.

Introduction

Background to the APRP

The Afghan Peace and Reintegration Process (APRP) commenced in June 2010. The immediate goal of the programme is to reintegrate rank and file Taliban and other members of insurgent groups whilst attempting to engage senior level commanders in a meaningful process of negotiation and reconciliation with the Afghan government. Through these two paths it is hoped that the majority of Afghan Armed Opposition Groups (AOG) will be reconciled with the Government of Afghanistan and their members return to peaceful civilian life.

The APRP is overseen by the High Peace Council, formed in October 2011, which has responsibility for guiding and ensuring the implementation of the programme. International donors include Japan, Italy, Germany, and Denmark. Additional technical support to the APRP is provided by the UNDP. At the local level, reintegration activities are overseen by Provincial Peace and Reintegration Councils (PPRC), which are responsible for vetting potential reintegrees for the programme and deciding into which communities they should be reintegrated. PPRCs are also responsible for initiating some community development projects that give employment to reintegrees.

Although the process is funded and supported by the international community, it is an Afghan-led and Afghan-implemented process which is intended also to reinforce national solidarity and, at a broad level, feed into national economic development, democratisation, and security.
The reintegration process consists of three main phases (Derksen, 2011):

- Outreach and negotiation: Local officials and peace council members contact and mediate between potential reintegrees (i.e. current insurgents) and the communities into which they want to reintegrate, mitigating – as far as possible – any potential sources of conflict.
- Demobilisation: The "mechanics" of demobilisation, this involves a vetting process for insurgents, weapons registration and collection, provision of a transitional assistance package, and provision of basic security assistance.
- Consolidation of peace: Provision of former insurgents with the necessary livelihood skills and jobs to provide for themselves and their families in the longer term.

As of March 2013, around 7,400 combatants had joined the process and a further 300 were awaiting verification (UNDP, 2014). Reintegrees are provided with transitional assistance packages which include assistance in finding work, often through developmental projects such as small infrastructure construction projects, vocational training, and assistance in re-orientation into civilian life. Employment opportunities include community recovery projects run by local and international NGOs, small infrastructure projects, agricultural training, and re-training as de-miners by organisations such as the HALO Trust. In some areas, reintegrees are recruited into the Afghan National or Local Police forces (ANP and ALP respectively) – this will be discussed further below.

The vetting procedure for insurgents wishing to join the APRP is set out in the Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) for the process (Joint Secretariat, 2011). The SOP document sets out the individual roles of the Joint Secretariat (JS), provincial governors, provincial chiefs of police, and representatives of particular line ministries at the local level. The document also sets out the eligibility criteria for joining the process, which include:

- Ex-combatants must be verified insurgents
- Ex-combatants must not be wanted for criminal offences that GIRoA determines prevent their entry into APRP

- Must not be foreign fighters
- Ex-combatants must be prepared to renounce violence and terrorism, and agree to live within the laws of Afghanistan

The second criterion leaves an ambiguity in the vetting process. Many insurgents are also wanted criminals, and have committed acts that are considered criminal by many community members. There is a differentiation between criminal acts and "acts of war", as such, but this nonetheless leaves a certain grey area. In cases of killings or murders, these acts may be considered criminal by community members or those involved, but do not disqualify insurgents from joining the process if they are considered acts of war by GIRoA. Achieving meaningful and sustainable reconciliation around these cases is a major challenge, and can cause a great deal of friction at the community level. Additionally, this ambiguity also allows armed criminal groups in some areas to recast their activities as those of insurgency and to join the APRP.

2013/14 presents an uncertain time in Afghanistan. The transition of responsibility for security to Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF), as well as the Presidential elections scheduled for 2014, create significant doubt around on-going stability in the country and the capability of ANSF to effectively manage the security situation.

Other research conducted by PTRO around the political and security transition in rural communities shows that many citizens are concerned about the withdrawal of international military forces (IMF), which in some areas is believed will lead to a security vacuum as ANSF are unable to maintain government control over many areas. Conversely, other respondents to this research stated that the security situation will improve with the withdrawal of IMF as areas become less "target-rich". Many within the country are unsure, however, about how results of the 2014 election might affect security in the country. Against this background of uncertainty and nervousness around Afghanistan's future, the success of the APRP becomes even more important.

In addition to the research for the present paper, PTRO has been working in the provinces concerned to build the capacity of women's groups around advocacy, conflict mediation, and dispute resolution. Although the purpose of this paper is not, as such, to evaluate these activities, where PTRO's workshops have had an impact on the participation of women in reintegration activities, dispute mediation, and public decision making processes more generally, this has been recognised and taken into account.

Literature Review

Although a relatively new process, a number of studies have looked at the APRP to date. The APRP must also be situated within the broader context of disarmament, demobilisation, and reintegration programmes (DDR). This section will briefly review existent literature on the APRP, and link some of the critiques of the APRP to those of other DDR projects in Afghanistan.

As the United States Institute of Peace notes, delays in implementation on the part of the GIRoA, and subsequent assumption by ISAF of many responsibilities of the APRP, reinforced the perception that the process was foreign-led, and thus fed suspicions around the motives behind the APRP in many communities from the outset (USIP, 2011). Other critics have noted that the two broad aims of the APRP, establishing democratic governance while encouraging economic development, are often in conflict with one another. Additionally, a lack of clarity around the meaning of "democracy" at the local level, along with a failure to pursue meaningful reconciliation amongst communities and between former insurgents and civilians weaken the APRP's progress towards its objectives (Quie, 2012).

In a paper published at the outset of the APRP in 2010, the Afghan Research and Evaluation Unit (AREU) set out a number of recommendations to assist in ensuring the success of the programme (Sajjad, 2010). These include transparency mechanisms and oversight in implementation, the management of expectations at the community level, and considering the demands of conflict victims. AREU also notes that the incentives and negotiations offered to reintegrees are not sufficient in addressing either the economic or political drivers of insurgent group recruitment.

The APRP follows a pattern familiar to other DDR programmes, and the APRP represents only the latest iteration of DDR programmes in Afghanistan; although the Bonn Agreement of 2001, which effectively gave the international community political and security authority in the country, included no explicit reference to DDR, the Afghan New Beginnings Programme (ANBP), commencing in 2001, included a major component of DDR. This initial round of DDR faced a number of internal and external challenges including a failure to provide meaningful economic alternatives for former insurgents, a failure to engage meaningfully with Taliban insurgents (the primary focus of DDR activities was the many militia and warlord factions present in the country in 2001), and the fact that many of the policies of the ANBP led to significant fragmentation of communities at the local level and even the return of many combatants to the insurgency (Zyck, 2009). Additionally, the ANBP also failed to demobilise many of the country's largest militias. The political face of the process, which included reconciliation with important commanders, and often the entry of those commanders into the Afghan government, disguised a number of failures in terms of demobilising militias (Guistozzi, 2008).

The design of the APRP attempted to rectify some of the organisational and strategic issues identified in the ANBP. The ANBP was criticised for failing to sufficiently co-ordinate Security Sector Reform (SSR) and DDR activities, and for not sufficiently capitalising on improved security to establish sustainable security apparatuses at the local level (Sedra, 2011). The APRP has attempted to align these different aspects by incorporating police recruitment into the process, providing improved assistance to reintegrees through the Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs, Martyrs, and the Disabled (MoLSAMD), and greater alignment of development and security organisations at the local level.

The APRP has been criticised for failing to engage with important and powerful groups based in Pakistan's Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA), which continue to control and influence many of the insurgent groups in Afghanistan. The difficulty of engaging these groups in meaningful negotiations towards reconciliation with the GIRoA could place severe limits on the success of the APRP in the future. Although the programme focusses on negotiation and reconciliation between high ranking insurgent commanders and the GIRoA, political engagement with insurgents groups operating from Pakistan

remains challenging. The International Crisis Group reinforces many of these criticisms in a paper calling for a re-evaluation of the APRP, reform of the High Peace Council (HPC), and stronger oversight, monitoring, and evaluation structures to ensure greater transparency around the process (ICG, 2012). The ICG observes that the APRP must be seen as part of a wider process of negotiations towards reaching a long-term political settlement securing peace in the country, and must feed this process through meaningful reconciliation and transitional justice at the local level.

Writing in 2011, the Peace Research Institute Oslo (PRIO) notes a number of challenges facing the implementation of the APRP (Derksen, 2011). These include the absence of a cohesive outreach policy which limits the effectiveness of negotiations with insurgents at the local level, unclear coordination structures within the APRP's complex management system, and problems with the vetting and registration of reintegrees. This has resulted in a disorganised picture of reintegration at the local level and poor data feeds to the national level. PRIO highlight doubts around the identity and roles of reintegrees, difficulties in keeping track of reintegrees, and ambiguity around their roles post-reintegration.

Women face vast challenges to participation in social and political life in Afghanistan. Under the Taliban, few girls attended school and participation for women in politics was non-existent; this left the country with a large, generational gap in terms of women with the necessary skills to advocate around their needs and input into political processes. The situation of women in the country has improved considerably since 2001, but numerous challenges remain for women to play a substantive and influential role in the reintegration process (CFR, 2011).

The APRP includes a gender mainstreaming policy, which obliges implementing partners to identify and work towards the particular needs of women, and for which UNDP is providing an additional $6 million. This policy is, however, vague in terms of concrete requirements and stipulations, stating only that this money be used by the APRP's implementing organisations for gender mainstreaming (Nijssen 2012). The gender mainstreaming policy identifies a number of potential areas of weakness for the APRP which form the focus of its recommendations, including (Joint Secretariat, 2011):

- Inadequate presence of women in the APRP, especially at the decision-making level.
- Limited provision of gender-specific monitoring and evaluation of reintegration activities.
- A limited understanding of the APRP among women.
- Poor information feeds from the national to the local level.

Human Rights Watch has noted the possible negative impact of "reconciliation" with certain groups on Afghanistan's women (HRW, 2010). The reconciliation and negotiation process involves many groups, including the Taliban and Hezb-i Islami (Gulbuddin), who have poor records on women's rights. The HRW report documents concerns from women throughout the country that reconciliation and reintegration activities, if not properly managed and subject to sufficient oversight, will impact negatively on their rights and welfare.

The Afghan Women's Network has called for a number of policy changes in the APRP to improve the position of women within and around the programme, including a stricter vetting procedure for reintegrees entering the Afghan Local Police (ALP) (who are reported to engage in sexual abuse of female community members), and more inclusion of women's networks in the APRP decision making process (AWN, 2011).

Methodology

The primary research for this paper was conducted by the Peace Training and Research Organisation (PTRO), an Afghan non-governmental organisation based in Kabul. As part of the Oxfam Novib-funded "Women and the APRP" project, PTRO conducted a number of advocacy and conflict mediation workshops in Afghanistan with the goal of improving female participation in decision-making processes around the APRP. The present report, and the research that informs it, will look partly at improvements in female participation across the lifetime of the project, but will also look at a number of themes around the APRP more broadly. These include:

- Drivers of reintegration
- Impacts of reintegration at the local level
- Successes and challenges of reintegration and the APRP

The research took place in four provinces of Afghanistan. These provinces represent the four provinces with the greatest number of reintegration activities and events. The provinces and districts targeted for the research are as follows:

- Baghlan: Pul-e Khumri, Baghlan-e Jadid
- Kunduz: Kunduz City, Khan Abad, Iman Sahib
- Herat: Herat City, Ghoryan, Robat Sangi
- Badghis: Qala-ye Naw, Ab Khamri, Muqur, Qadis

These districts were selected to give a representation of both urban and rural communities within the provinces selected, and are all located within the north and west of Afghanistan; as such they are not representative of the entire country. However, they are representative of locations in which there is support for women's involvement in the reintegration process, and in which there are credible on-going reintegration events.

The research was conducted in three rounds, in order to give an evolving picture of reintegration and the peace process more broadly over the period of security and political transition. Collection tools were principally qualitative in nature, since the focus of the research was mainly social.

The research sample consisted of four main population groups:

- Female community members (often participants in PTRO's advocacy training workshops)
- Participants in reintegration activities
- Government representatives
- Local community leaders, elders etc.

These groups were selected to give the research a balanced perspective on reintegration activities carried out under the APRP and its effects on communities, while at the same time allowing the voices of female community members to be heard directly. Data from the female respondents was collected through focus group discussions (FGD) while data from other population groups was collected through individual interviews, due to the sensitivity of interviewing individual women in certain areas. Where possible, however, the research team attempted to identify prominent local women in communities for individual community leader interviews. Questionnaires used for data collection can be found in Annex Two. Due to the similar nature of their positions in the community, the same questionnaire was used for both government representatives and community leaders.

A total of 343 respondents were interviewed across the four provinces for each phase of the research, including:

- 54 reintegrees
- 212 female respondents
- 21 government officials
- 56 community leaders, elders etc.

The first section of this paper will look at some the general opinions of communities towards the APRP, some of the challenges it is facing at the local level, and the impact that it is having on the security and economy of these communities. This section will highlight the complex linkages between reintegration, security, and local economies. The second section will look particularly at the role of women in community decision making processes and the APRP specifically, focussing on the ways in which these roles are linked to the success of the programme and its impact on the security situation. The final section will look at the views of reintegrees of the process, and their views on the participation of women in the process and the possible roles open to female community members.

Methodological Challenges

The research methodology presents a number of challenges and difficulties, including:

- **Statistical inference and significance:** The relatively small sample size, and the fact that a sample size calculation was not used, limits the statistical significance of the sample and thus the ability to infer wider truths from the research. However, due to the qualitative nature of the research and its areas of focus, this does not undermine its validity. The research was conducted in both urban and rural areas to try to gain as full a picture of reintegration as possible. As stated above, the provinces targeted have been selected for the frequency of reintegration activities there, and as such constitute a representative sample of provinces in which relevant and credible reintegration activities have taken place.
- **Changes in respondent groups:** Although many respondents were the same across the three tranches of research, research field teams faced problems in locating some respondents for the second and third rounds of research. Reintegrees, although they are registered with PPRCs and therefore theoretically easy to locate, occasionally moved to different communities throughout the course of the research and were often difficult to find. Field researchers attempted as far as possible to reach the same respondents and, if this proved impossible, selected suitable substitutes instead.
- **Security:** The uncertain security situation in some areas presented challenges to research teams in terms of access. Particularly in Muqur district, Baghdis province, areas were inaccessible for some of the time of the project due to the worsening security situation in this remote district. PTRO's field researchers have extensive experience of working in conflict afflicted and challenging settings and, as such, are able to mitigate security risks challenges. Although alterations to a number of PTRO's workshop locations had to take place due to this, the research was not effected as directly.
- **Sensitivity of topics:** The sensitivity of some of the questions limited the willingness of certain groups, particularly government representatives, community leaders, and reintegrees, to answer the questions. Questions around the social role of women, and the possibility of giving women a greater role in social decision making processes, were particularly sensitive in many areas and a number of respondents refused to continue their interviews after these questions had been started. However, this unwillingness to respond to certain sensitive topics is telling in itself, and has been incorporated into the research analysis accordingly.

Research Findings

The APRP in the Community

Security and Reintegration

The research found that perceptions of the links between reintegration and the security situation varied greatly across the provinces. In general, respondents were positive that reintegration brought about improvements in the security situation in their communities, as local insurgent groups demobilised and ceased their attacks on government and military targets. This was far from uniform, however, and in some areas, particularly Herat province, respondents questioned the legitimacy and sustainability of the security brought by the APRP. In some cases, as shall be seen, reintegration was in itself seen as a source of insecurity.

Community members welcomed the security that the demobilisation of insurgents brought, but were wary in places where many reintegrees had joined the Afghan Local Police (ALP). The ALP was seen as a source of insecurity which the government should bring more firmly under its control. Other respondents reported that reintegrated insurgents had simply gone back to their opposition commanders and local violence had continued because the government had not fulfilled its reintegration promises, including promises to release relatives from prison or provide short-term payment upon reintegration. This was particularly prominent in Kunduz province, where units of the Arbakai, a traditional tribal defence militia, had undergone "reintegration" and been made into units of the ALP. The militiamen continued previous negative practices in the community including robbery, extortion, and even sexual harassment.[1] These units are frequently very powerful within communities:

> "No, we don't have [conflicts] in our village but we have some powerful Arbakai Police here. The government can't say anything to them because they are extremely powerful; however the people of this village are tired of their presence, because they create problems for the people and are even involved in illegal sexual activities. But they are supported by important figures."
>
> Female Focus Group Participant, Kunduz City

Furthermore, in both Badghis and Herat there was a strong belief that the APRP had entirely failed to "disarm" the participants. In Herat, residents were concerned that the reintegrees had merely handed over old guns and had kept their actual weapons at home for future use, while in Badghis the government appeared to have made no attempt at disarming the reintegrees at all and instead had provided some groups with control over check-posts and responsibility for local security. The result in Badghis is a number of areas in which reintegrees are continuing to control the population. In these areas, locals are unhappy with the re-arming of former insurgents, which has done little to further reconciliation:

> "People want justice for the opposition that have joined peace process, but the government gives weapons back to them. So this issue has a very bad effect on local people in our area."
>
> Government Representative, Herat City

Even in areas where reintegration reportedly had positive impacts on the security situation, and despite having brought local security and some stability, the previous occupations of reintegrees were not always clear. Some respondents held the belief that the programme was continuing to reward criminals and some disaggregated reintegrees between those genuinely pursuing peace and those that have only entered the programme for personal gains. As such it is difficult to unpack exactly who has reintegrated

1. The Arbakai were semi-formalised as a community defence force in some communities from 2010 onwards. Problems with these units have been widely documented elsewhere, cf. al-Jazeera 2009

and what their ties to the insurgency really were. Furthermore, in Ab Khamri district in Badghis province one community reported that the reintegrees in their area had entered the programme multiple times, each time leaving to the mountains, fighting alongside the Taliban and then re-entering the process in order to gain the initial payments again. In other cases, insurgents in Badghis had joined the process, were armed and trained by the ALP, and then re-joined their Taliban units:

> "Yes, some people who had been reintegrated through the peace process were deployed in the local police force and armed by the government. After a few months, they went back and joined the Taliban, and took their weapons with them. This left a negative impact on the community and the people were disappointed with the peace process."
>
> Government Representative, Murghab district, Badghis province

In Kunduz, there were widespread reports that "insurgents" were simply armed criminals who joined reintegration for payment, and then had, frequently, returned to previous illegal practices when post-reintegration salaries proved insufficient. In the final research tranche in Kunduz, there were widespread comments that the pace of intake of reintegrees had slowed. Furthermore there were comments that those who are now reintegrating are members of the Taliban who are looking to recuperate in safety – without the threat of arrest – and once they recover their ability to fight they return to combat in the mountainous areas of the north.

Throughout all of the provinces, the questionable security dividends brought about by reintegration activities threaten the long-term legitimacy of the programme in the eyes of the population. Security concerns also impacted a variety of other aspects of the APRP, including issues with the management and politics behind the programme.

Government and Politics of the APRP

Although the three rounds of research revealed that most people were aware of improvements in government services, many claimed that the programme should have delivered more, as many of the projects were mired in corruption. Extensive bribery and the low quality of materials and workmanship were cited as examples where infrastructure projects in particular were wasteful. Potential beneficiaries were reported to pay bribes in order to gain access to development projects, including employment on small infrastructure rehabilitation projects. This was consistent throughout all phases of the research, with respondents in all three tranches citing corruption as a major impediment to the success of the project. Many respondents stated that nepotism is widespread in the process, as both government officials involved in the process and reintegrees themselves are often those with personal connections to important local government figures:

> "For the last five years we hadn't any obstacles [to the APRP] but now we do, it is fanaticism in the regime and there is also well known corruption in the government. Even the right people can't get the right positions due to corruption."
>
> Community Leader, Robat Sangi district, Herat province

This nepotism threatens to undermine the impartiality and independence of the APRP, alienating community members from the process and discouraging insurgents from joining. In some cases, only those reintegrees with personal connections to people in positions of authority within the APRP enjoyed any of its benefits:

> "The process is not successful. The program was such that when they [the Taliban] are reintegrated, the government would provide them with jobs and sources of income. In reality this did not happen. Only those with good connections benefited."
>
> Community leader, Kunduz province

Although allegations of corruption are often motivated by personal interests and are difficult to substantiate through interviews alone, reinforcing the impartial nature of the process is necessary if it is to maintain traction and legitimacy within communities.

The government role within the programme appeared to be often undertaken in a politicalised – rather than impartial – manner. As a result both community leaders and reintegrees themselves complained of being ignored by the government and threatened to re-join the insurgency. The political nature of the process threatens to undermine credibility in Badghis, and in other provinces as well. Many of the female respondents stated that one barrier to their involvement in the project was that it had ceased to be a "public" process but had become a "political" one instead – the implication being that a public process is run transparently for the benefit of the general public while a political one is run for the benefit of those in positions of authority. This not only undermines the perceived legitimacy of the APRP but also limits the scope for female involvement in the project – or, indeed, the involvement of anyone without the right connections:

> "If the peace process continues as a public process it is positive, but in the recent years the process has become political, which has increased the gap between the process and the people. The government is also responsible as they haven't fulfilled their promises, while now people no longer trust government promises."
>
> Female respondent, Badghis province

It is, of course, beyond the scope of the present paper to validate these allegations of corruption, and allegations against local officials – often made by other government representatives and community leaders – can be motivated themselves by personal resentments and rivalries. However, the widespread perception amongst community members, women, and reintegrees that the process involves at least a degree of corruption is worrying.

In addition to allegations of corruption, local politics was also closely tied to security. In Badghis, respondents stated that important local figures (power brokers) have a vested interested in maintaining a level of insecurity in the area:

> "We need to disarm the power brokers. It is certain that the power brokers benefit from insecurity and that is why they try to arm more men, create conflicts and benefit from the situation."
>
> Community Leader, Badghis province

Clearly, many powerful local figures have a vested interested in retaining their militias. An inability of the government to extend power over these powerful local figures means that they are able to maintain their armed factions and continue to destabilise certain areas.

Across all four provinces it also appears that the government offices attached to the APRP remain weak, lacking capacity, and are under-utilised. It was evident, again in Badghis, that the NDS were running the reintegration process and that the PPRC were relatively side-lined. Furthermore, reintegrees and community members stated that they had limited exposure to the PPRCs in the provinces and that if grievances or problems arose they were usually dealt with through community members.

Despite these negative views, many respondents were also happy that reintegration activities, and the improved security situation that they brought about, had allowed the government to extend much-needed services into areas where access to schools and clinics, for example, had previously been limited. Clearly, in many areas the GIRoA is capitalising on newly accessible areas in which the APRP is being implemented to extend services to these areas. This not only benefits local people who were previously unable to access these services, but also serves to reinforce trust in the GIRoA. Basic infrastructure projects, such as drinking water sources, have also started in many areas that are newly secure.

Another positive outcome of the APRP which was widely cited by female respondents, community leaders, and government representatives was that a sense of "national solidarity" or "unity" would be fostered by the process:

> "Yes it is a positive process; all the Afghans will have unity."
>
> Female Focus Group participant, Herat city

However, several respondents also stated that the programme did not emphasise the national spirit enough, and that more should be done to inculcate some sense of national solidarity amongst reintegrees.

Reintegration and Local Economies

The research highlighted a close connection between reintegration, security, and local economies. In many areas, a lack of job opportunities was widely cited by both the reintegrees and other respondent groups as being a major cause of conflict recidivism. Additionally, positive changes in local economies, including improved income generation opportunities, offer a significant incentive to insurgents considering joining the peace process.

Improvements in the security situation were seen to have positive impacts on the economic situation of many areas throughout the course of the research. As insurgent groups demobilise, and the security situation improves, local businesses see more benefit in longer term investment. Additionally, improvements in infrastructure in newly secure areas allow local businesses to improve their capacities. International development organisations have also extended projects into newly secure areas:

> "In the areas where traveling was not easy, schools are now open and government services are active there. Development organizations have started their work in distant areas and the government's role has increased too."
>
> Female Community Leader, Badghis province

In Herat and Baghlan in particular many respondents stated that improved security had increased the level of investment in the local economy by outside businessmen:[2]

> "Before, the businessmen didn't trust the situation and were not able to invest in Afghanistan, but currently they feel safe and are interested in investing in Afghanistan."
>
> Female Focus Group Participant, Husseinkheil Village, Baghlan province

Although it is difficult to verify a causative relationship between reintegration and foreign investment in areas such as Herat, the perceived ties between improvements in security brought about by the APRP and increases in investment is in itself significant. It is also worth noting, however, that Herat, located close to the Iranian border and on a number of important trade routes, is in an advantageous position for

2. Foreign Direct Investment has increased in Herat over the past year (Tolo News, 2013), although whether this is directly due to improvements in the security situation is not clear.

garnering investment as compared to other provinces such as Baghlan, which are much more remote. However, the APRP and reintegration activities are having a positive impact on the economic situation in many areas, and these economic improvements continue to strengthen support for and positive attitudes towards the APRP.

In some cases, respondents – and particularly community leaders and elders – expressed resentment that reintegrees were receiving disproportionate attention and benefits from the GIRoA and international NGOs. This feeds disillusionment with the Afghan government and INGOs within communities and although the chances of this resentment fuelling conflict recidivism or further recruitment by insurgent groups is low (most of those who expressed this resentment expressed equal disliking for insurgents and Taliban), it nonetheless does little to reinforce the credibility of NGOs and the GIRoA as equitable service providers in these areas.

In Kunduz, the three rounds of research showed little improvement in the local economy which could be attributed directly to the APRP. In the final research round, respondents stated that the local economy had not improved a great deal in the previous few months, and improvements that had taken place were not attributed to the APRP.

Transition and the Future of the APRP

A number of respondents, particularly in Herat, noted that as transition progresses in the country, the uncertain security situation presents a challenge to reintegration activities. As local warlords and AOG jostle for local political influence and attempt to fill the security vacuum around the provinces as ISAF withdraw, many are attempting to re-recruit demobilised combatants through a combination of promises of increased salaries and campaigns of threats and harassment of local populations.

The political and security transition in many rural areas is driving reintegration as well as recidivism. As international forces withdraw and Afghans assume responsibility for both political governance and security, many insurgents feel drawn to joining a newly independent national government. In many areas, the presence of foreign troops is a major factor in driving insurgent recruitment, and the perception that the country is occupied drives dissatisfaction with the government:

> "I fought because of the presence of foreigners, but when they have withdrawn I joined with the peace process here. My only objection to the government was the presence of the foreigners at that time in our district."
>
> Reintegree, Herat city

The success of reintegration was often seen as contributing to ensuring that foreign forces withdraw fully and no longer require a role in maintaining Afghanistan's security.

In Herat, there was a generally positive sense throughout the course of the research that withdrawal would bring a greater sense of national unity, which was linked as a key element in encouraging insurgents to leave their units:

"I feel good [about the APRP] because there will be unity among the local people. On the other hand, foreign forces will withdraw from our country and we will build our country by ourselves."

Community leader, Ghoryan district, Herat province

Again, transition fosters a sense of national cohesion and independency which can be capitalised on to increase intake into the APRP.

Perceptions of the longer-term success of the APRP were closely tied to perceptions of how well the process is functioning at present. Respondents who were positive about the on-going process stated that it would continue to have numerous and long-term positive impacts, including greater security, more national cohesion, and improvements in the economy. Those respondents who were critical of the way the process is being implemented, citing corruption and nepotism as major problems, were more pessimistic about the future of the process, stating that it would cause greater divisions within the community if not properly managed:

> "Unless the process becomes a public process and both men and women are given equal rights in it, it won't be successful. If politics is removed from the process, it will achieve permanent stability for the people of the country. People are concerned; they are not sure what will happen after the year 2014."
>
> Female Community Leader, Badghis province

The full and equal participation of both and women women in the APRP was seen by many respondents as key to ensuring its long term success. The next section will explore this in more detail.

Women and the APRP

Women's Awareness and Perceptions of the APRP

The female respondents cited a number of sources of information on the APRP, including official media such as radio and television. Overall, these appear to be effective at reaching most communities, who generally have access to radio. In Badghis province, however, which is more rural and in parts more remote than the other provinces, much more frequent mention was made of non-media sources of information on the APRP. These include mosques, local preachers, Imams, and community leaders. Some of the female respondents relied entirely on these individuals as sources of information on the APRP, and called for further information to be provided through these less formal but more accessible media:

> "Information on the peace process must be given to people through religious leaders, mosques and meetings with women."
>
> Female Focus Group Participant, Badghis province

Across all of the provinces, women expressed generally positive attitudes towards the APRP and reintegration process from the outset of the research; indeed, attitudes of women towards the programme were markedly more positive than the male respondents – although some female respondents expressed similar concerns about the programme to male respondents, including the presence of widespread corruption, nepotism, and doubts around the legitimacy of certain reintegrees.

The positive impacts of the APRP most widely cited by female respondents include, as noted previously, positive developments in local economies, improvements in the security situation in many areas, and extension of government and development organisations' services to newly secure areas. Additionally, many female respondents were happy about the greater sense of "national unity" and community cohesion which they felt resulted from reintegration.

The baseline research showed that many female respondents had little information about the APRP, although the vast majority were aware of its existence. This lack of information was viewed as a failure on the part of those implementing the APRP and the female respondents stated that more information should be given through media – particularly the radio – and local dissemination mechanisms such as tribal leaders, preachers, and mosques. This was particularly the case in Herat and Badghis provinces which displayed a significant variation in levels of understanding across the districts. In one village, Ab Khamri, there was an almost complete lack of awareness of reintegration projects on the part of female respondents despite the fact that reintegration activities were taking place in their own village. This is reflective of an overall lack of awareness of the exact processes of reintegration, as well as decision-making processes related to reintegration activities.

The female respondents cited a number of criticisms of the APRP. In most areas, some mention of corruption on the part of officials involved in the APRP was made. This corruption is seen to undermine the putatively neutral process, and involves a great deal of nepotism, with influential local figures appointing friends and relatives to key positions in government bodies related to the APRP.

Participation in Social Activities

From the outset of the research it was clear that while women's participation in social life, and particularly community decision-making, was limited across all provinces, it varied widely by area. Baseline research showed that in Kunduz, interviewees were not aware of any community forums for women, and none of the participants had attended traditional community meetings or met with community elders or councillors to discuss any issue, related to reintegration or not. Respondents were generally more aware of women's forums in Baghlan, which included the local solidarity councils, social

development councils, district councils and other ad-hoc women's groups, but even here many stated that they did not actively participate in them. In rural areas especially, most respondents reported that women played no role in community decisions. Even in urban areas with women in prominent positions, these women face a great number of structural challenges when representing problems or raising their voices:

> "Women's role is very weak and invisible in Badghis province. Including myself, two other women are members of the provincial council. We don't have unity among us, we couldn't even express the council's problems to a delegation that came from Kabul. The Women Affairs Department seat is still vacant as we don't have qualified woman for the position, while enough attention is not paid and the issue is always ignored. Even if the women of the province raise their voice, it won't be heard."
>
> Female Respondent, Badghis province

In some places the respondents were aware of women in positions of authority, including those in government departments (particularly the provincial branch of the Department for Women's Affairs) and prominent local NGOs. However, in Badghis many remarked that the role of female teachers or government officials was limited to women living in the main city, Qala-ye Naw, and that these women were not able to represent the rest of the female population. As such there is a disconnect between women who are active at the community level due to their profession and the wider female population who remain restricted. In many of the rural communities in Badghis, conditions for females were reported to be very bad, finding themselves with restricted movement, no role outside of the house and violence in the home. This situation was compounded by a lack of social groups for women, prevalent illiteracy and an overall lack of awareness by women and men of women's rights.

Even in relatively freer areas such as Herat, women reported being side-lined from decision-making processes. It was evident in both Ghoryan and Robat Sangi districts within Herat that women were able to access employment (where available), that women's groups worked with the community and women development councils existed. However, these bodies had limited ability to directly influence decisions made by the male headed local councils – as such, issues raised by women would only be taken forward if they were seen as important by men.

The public role of women was, however, reported to increase in prominence throughout the course of the research in certain areas, particularly in urban areas in Herat and Kunduz where, in the final research tranche, both female respondents and male community leaders and government representatives stated that they have held meetings to discuss the APRP and social issues more generally. This is perhaps indicative of an increasing awareness of advocacy techniques and social participation mechanisms introduced through PTRO's own programme of training and mentoring.

Despite a lack of direct participation, women in all areas stated that they nonetheless have access to several mechanisms for influencing community decision making processes, as the following quotation shows:

> "Inside the family women have direct roles, while outside of the family they spread their views through their men."
>
> Female Focus Group Participant, Herat City

This highlights the importance of women's influence within the domestic sphere, and the manner in which women are able to communicate their opinions and even influence decision making processes through male family members.

Women's awareness of advocacy and mechanisms through which they can present and redress grievances also increased through the course of the research, especially in urban areas. Many female respondents stated that they play an active role in conflict mediation and resolution within communities, but only with conflicts around family issues that can be resolved domestically without involving the wider community. Participation in PTRO's conflict mediation and advocacy workshops contributed greatly to increasing the capacity of many individuals and women's groups to solve disputes within the community – many of the positive changes that occurred in the role of women in reintegration across the three research rounds can be attributed to this. In the case of disputes that require the intervention of the community in general, or are more complex, the female family members refer the conflict to local elders or a shura. The female respondents emphasised, however, the importance of resolving family grievances effectively. In communities which are closely knit, and where causes of conflict (land, wedding disputes, etc.) can overlap in complex ways, family disputes can quickly escalate and spill over into broad conflicts in the community. Effective resolution of grievances as soon as they appear, then, is essential in prevention of community level conflicts.

The participation of women in community and public life was seen to evolve over the course of the research. Although many of the same obstacles to female participation remain in most of the target communities, the female respondents, and particularly those in urban areas, stated that the obstacles, and particularly negative attitudes of men, diminished over the course of the project. This is perhaps due, in part, to increased confidence on the part of women in these communities in terms of advocating around their issues:

> "As compared to previous years, women have gotten the courage to participate in society and in meetings. A while ago I went to Qadis district, there the women requested from me to call them in meetings and enrol them in classes for women. Now we can say that women have gained the courage to make such requests and men have also given them permission to work outside."
>
> Female respondent, Badghis province

Despite these positive developments, a number of female respondents stated that greater education for men is necessary if their roles are to increase. Several, particularly in Kunduz, stated that greater education for men, particularly around the roles and rights given to women under Islamic law (rather than the restrictions that religion places upon them), would help them to gain a more prominent role in the community.

In many areas, particularly Baghlan, female participation was closely linked to the security situation, as women feel unable to venture outside of the home in areas in which robbery and attacks are rife, and men are more likely to restrict their movement. Over the course of the research, improvements in the security situation – such as less frequent attacks – in a number of areas allowed for increased female participation in community social activities, such as more frequent meetings with government representatives and greater freedom to travel around communities for business. The uncertain security situation as the transition process reaches completion in 2014 only increases the importance of ensuring women feel secure enough to participate in the social and political lives of their communities.

Women's Role in Reintegration

The majority of female respondents identified their role as being primarily within the family unit. Many women stated that they are involved in conflict mediation and resolution, but only with regards to domestic issues that can or should be solved within the family – rather than public or social disputes, such as disputes between families over land, which are referred to community elders and shuras. Despite this, the women emphasised the importance of their role as mediators, and the importance of resolving family disputes quickly and privately. The nature of these disputes varies widely but can include disputes

over marriage, dowries, and husbands mistreating wives. In a number of cases, the desire of young women to continue education (to high school or university) caused disputes within households.

In some areas – and particularly Kunduz, where reintegrees have joined the ALP – there were reports of reintegrees themselves opposing women taking a public role in the community or even addressing complaints to the government:

> "Some of the reintegrees are enrolled in the local police; these reintegrees are not well- mannered people, and people hate them. I witnessed an incident in which a woman was badly beaten by them, while they were preventing the woman from making a complaint to the government."
>
> Local Community Leader, Imam Sahib district, Kunduz province

Across the different areas, there were differing reports of women's involvement in reintegration processes which also took a number of different forms. In the rural areas of Herat, for example, the women were not aware of any formal groups for females to be involved in the APRP, but they did know of informal and unofficial collaborative networks that had formed to support and educate women about reintegration. Many of these collaborative networks were formed by PTRO and a number of active groups stated that the workshops they had attended provided them with vital knowledge and contacts. Additionally, in all areas a variety of different roles were proposed for women. In Kunduz these roles were generally higher profile than in other areas, including roles in government and the Peace Councils. While these aspirations were largely confined to residents of urban areas, community and government leaders were positive about the contribution of women in these areas and stated that the role of women should be increased.

Although female peace councils and solidarity committees exist in many urban areas, and women were aware of their activities and members, these groups rarely have an active role in setting policies around reintegration and the treatment of reintegrees. Many of the female focus group participants, and individual female community leaders, called for a greater role for women, which could include reaching out to provide support to the families of insurgents and informing women in the community about the APRP:

> "Women should be in contact with the families of insurgent groups in order to build trust among them and government. On the other hand women are able to inform families about reintegration processes."
>
> Female Focus Group Participant, Robat Sangi district, Herat province

Aside from a potential role providing support to family members, women's participation in the formal processes of the APRP is at present extremely limited. None of the female respondents stated that they have the ability to accept or reject reintegrees from their areas. A number of respondents complained that reintegrees had entered the community who had mistreated community members. Despite this, however, many of the female respondents were happy that insurgents had left their units and appeared willing to accept them back into the community. Of much greater concern, particularly in Kunduz and Herat (although not solely), was that many reintegrees were known by the female respondents not to be Taliban or other insurgents at all, but rather merely civilians – or even criminals – who had simply turned in privately owned weapons. This constituted the primary group that female respondents stated should not be allowed to reintegrate into communities – partly as they often continue criminal activities even after reintegration. As with the male respondents who raised similar concerns, this also undermines the legitimacy and credibility of the APRP in the eyes of many female community members.

Despite the lack of formal avenues for participation in the APRP in most areas, women are nonetheless playing a key role in ensuring the success of reintegration in individual cases. The principal roles of women in reintegration activities at present, as with many social functions of women in Afghan society, are also mainly within the family and household. However, the importance of the role of women within households, and extended family units more broadly, was emphasised by many of the female focus group participants. Many emphasised that this does constitute an important and active role in reintegration activities, and particularly in convincing insurgents and combatants to join the peace process:

> "Women have an active role. A good example is a woman by name of Safra, who was from Shagi area. She said to her own husband, if you don't join the peace process then I will never talk to you again, but if you want to join then I will support you. Finally he joined with the peace process in our district."
>
> Female Focus Group Participant, Robat Sangi district, Herat province

Vignettes such as this give an idea of the role played by women in reintegration; a role which is not public, often being confined entirely to the domestic sphere, and yet one which is frequently essential in encouraging, convincing, and supporting family members through reintegration. Although the scope for female participation in public life remains limited in most areas, the scope for this kind of role within the family is significant and important. Women in families are frequently counselled on decisions and, although a number of female respondents stated that they feel they are rarely actually listened to, their opinions can carry a great deal of weight. This is especially true of mothers of combatants. Among both the female respondents and reintegrees, there were several cases cited of young insurgents being encouraged and convinced by their mothers to join reintegration programmes.

Going beyond the scope of the APRP and current reintegration activities, the female respondents were widely aware of the role they have to play in ensuring a peaceful future for their communities. Respondents stated frequently that women are responsible for raising children, and for providing them with correct tarbia and akhlaq.[3] Beyond the timeframe of the APRP and the next two years, the role of women in raising children will be key in ensuring that another generation of Afghanistan's youth, having grown up in uncertain times and in a country rife with violence and poverty, do not turn to insurgent groups in the future.

Barriers to Female Participation

A wide range of different barriers to female involvement in the APRP and social decision making more generally were cited by the different groups. For the community leaders and government representatives, these could be broken down into social barriers and barriers in terms of female capacity – although the two overlap to a significant extent. The main social barriers cited are negative social ideas around female participation in social activities (which is seen as taboo in most areas), a lack of awareness of women's rights, and cultural barriers to women's participation. Other barriers, which are closely related to and frequently stem from social barriers, include a lack of capacity on the part of women (including education), and a lack of awareness among women of their own rights.

In some cases, respondents gave religious reasons for women not participating, stating that Islam forbids women from participation in the social and public spheres:

> "This is Afghanistan and we are Muslim people, in Islam women are for house work, while men should work outside of the house."
>
> Reintegree, Muqur district, Badghis province

3. Akhlaq and tarbia refer to the traditional upbringing of children in Afghanistan

However, a number of respondents also contrasted the rights given to women under Islamic law with the social and cultural restrictions placed upon them, and stated that more education for men around the Islamic legal rights of women would help to overcome this:

> "It is visibility written in the Holy Quran that women and men both have the same rights and they should both have the same participation in social, political, and development affairs because there is no distinction between them."
>
> Community Leader, Baghlan province

This draws attention to the complex nature of barriers to female participation. In some cases, Islamic laws are taken to constitute a preclusion of women from public life, while other individuals take an opposing view – that Islamic law constitutes an argument for educational and participatory equality.

The female respondents cited a wide range of barriers to their own participation in social activities. These again include negative social attitudes, the fact that women participating in community life is, for men, a shameful thing in many communities, and a lack of female education and understanding of their own rights. Several female respondents stated that more education for men, around the importance of involving women in social decision making and their rights given to them by Afghan law, is necessary. The female respondents were highly critical of the barriers to their participation, and none of the women stated that they themselves should not be more involved in social decision making. Most of this criticism was directed against male community members and their influence over social practices:

> "The men are ignorant, they are not aware of women's rights; they don't want women to be involved in social decision making."
>
> Female Focus Group Respondent, Badghis province

The barriers cited by the female respondents can also be disaggregated by urban and rural areas. Just as the female respondents noted that more women have more prominent social positions in urban areas, the barriers to female participation were reported to be different in these areas and linked to social practices and education:

> "The city people are educated and modern, but the villagers are not modern and they don't allow women to come out from their houses without their husbands. But in the city women are involved in social activities."
>
> Female Focus Group Participant, Pul-e Khumri district, Baghlan province

This highlights the different social and cultural barriers facing women in different regions, and the need for more gender-aware policies tailored to the specific needs of communities.

An additional barrier posed to female participation is the unwillingness of women to meet with certain insurgents. This is particularly the case in areas where the credibility and motives of insurgents have been called into question – such as Kunduz and Herat – where females did not feel comfortable meeting with reintegrees whom they felt were largely criminal groups that had not been comprehensively disarmed, and might pose a threat to their security.

The APRP's Reintegrees

Joining the APRP

The reintegrees cited a wide variety of reasons for having joined the APRP. Commonly, reintegrees stated that they were simply tired of fighting and living the life of an insurgent, which offers little stability, comfort, or material reward to insurgents. Others realised that they had been misled by their commanders and leaders of insurgents units, who advertise themselves as fighting a jihad against foreign invaders, only for recruits to find themselves engaged in acts of robbery and bullying in communities:

> "I saw that the Taliban are not doing Holy War; this is not a Jihad."
>
> Reintegree, Muqur district, Badghis province

A number of reintegrees stated that ideological disenchantment with their units caused them to join the peace process. In a small number of cases, reintegrees complained that they had been badly treated by the commanders of their insurgent units, with some Taliban commanders demanding zakat[2] from their troops.

A number of reintegrees stated that they joined out some sense of national spirit, or a desire to bring peace and security to Afghanistan. This is often linked to conflict fatigue, as insurgents no longer see the on-going insurgency as having the potential for realising its goals, and feel that participation in peaceful civilian life is a more positive contribution to Afghanistan's future. Seeing that the APRP is an Afghan-led process, insurgents have come to believe that it is one that will be beneficial for the country as a whole. This is enhanced by the transition process and the withdrawal of international forces:

> "Most of the insurgent groups are fighting with the foreign forces because of faith. Since the transition process is implemented in our country, we decided to join the government and stop the war."
>
> Reintegree, Herat province

Other personal reasons were also common, such as relatives being put in jail, or prisoners being released from prison. In some cases, it appears that insurgents promised to join the process on the provision that other jailed insurgents were released. In many of these instances, the government has not followed through on its promise to release prisoners. These promises are often made in the course of negotiations between insurgents and APRP authorities during the course of the reintegration process.

Commonly, reintegrees also stated that they were looking for the opportunity to enjoy a normal life with their families, and to be able to provide them with more stable and less risky economic support. Several insurgents joined the reintegration programme because it had promised them employment and a stable income – a number suggested that these promises had not materialised.

In some cases commanders had decided to demobilise their entire units and individual combatants had little choice but to enrol in reintegration as well. In these cases, reintegrees often maintain close links to commanders even after reintegration – some stated that their former commanders, who often continue to be influential figures at the local level even once their units have been demobilised, are their main point of contact for redressing grievances and solving conflicts in the community.

The processes through which reintegrees enter the APRP also differ widely. Some approach community

4. A religious donation to a particular cause or charity, zakat constitutes one of the Five Pillars of Islam. In this case, however, reintegrees indicated that zakat was extortionate

leader or elders, and are then referred to local PPRCs. Others approach the GIRoA directly to enter the process. Community leaders appear to be the predominant means of contacting the APRP. Entry into the process for insurgents often involves a degree of negotiation, and some reintegrees appear to include conditions, such as those mentioned above, in order to secure their cooperation with the programme. In many cases, it is not clear whether representatives of the local government, security forces, or national government were involved in these negotiations, and the capability of different groups to make promises that they are able to follow through on is often questioned. It is frequently not clear which bodies are extending promises and conditions to reintegrees (such as promises of employment or positions in the police, or the release of relatives from prison), and in many cases it seems that these government bodies are unable to fulfil these promises.

The diversity of reasons for joining the reintegration process emphasises the complexity of the task of demobilisation and reintegration. Reintegration occurs both through negotiations with important militia leaders and through convincing individual combatants through incentives and appeals to a sense of solidarity. Striking the right balance between the two, as well as including a degree of solidarity in the programme, is an on-going challenge.

Reintegrees' Views of the APRP

The reintegrees interviewed expressed varying opinions of the APRP. Across all areas and throughout the course of the research, a great number of reintegrees expressed dissatisfaction and resentment of the government. This stemmed from a perceived failure on the part of the government to deliver on promises made to insurgents when joining the reintegration projects. Many stated that they still had no job, no income, and were unable to approach government offices or services because they were branded as Taliban, or even al-Qaeda, and viewed with mistrust or open hostility by government officials:

> "I am not happy with the government and the district as they promised us a lot, but implemented nothing. In government offices we are treated as Taliban. My life is damaged now; neither the government nor the Taliban accept us."
>
> Reintegree, Muqur district, Badghis province

Many reintegrees accepted a lump sum of cash upon starting reintegration, as part of a transitional assistance package, but received little assistance after this. For many, supporting families and children was becoming increasingly difficult.

Although reintegrees, particularly those that were high ranking members of insurgent units, sometimes have unrealistically ambitious ideas of their economic situation and social standing after reintegration (including one former commander who expressed frustration that his attempted nomination of himself as commander of a local ANP unit had been inexplicably rejected), it is clear that the poor economic condition of reintegrees in many areas is leading to widespread resentment of the GIRoA and international community, which has the potential to feed conflict recidivism in the future. Ensuring that reintegrees are able to meet the basic needs of their families is key in stopping widespread return to insurgents units. This again reinforces the close ties between successful reintegration and economic development at the local level.

In some areas, however, particularly in Baghlan province, a number of reintegrees have been employed in small infrastructure projects. This provides them with a salary and a number of them were happy with the assistance that they had received. In other cases, reintegrees had joined the ANA, ANP, or ALP. As has been seen previously, communities take mixed views of the position of reintegrees in these police units.

Since having joined the APRP, most of the reintegrees interviewed had, at some point, been threatened

by the Taliban or their former units or commanders. The most common forms of threat were received by telephone call or shebname, letters left outside their houses at night or delivered via a courier. The reintegrees were often blamed by the Taliban for joining the government, giving up their weapons, or giving up details of Taliban operations to the ANSF. Some reintegrees had even been attacked, with small mines being placed outside their houses at night. This led to many reintegrees being forced to move away from their original communities in fear of their lives. Arriving in new and unfamiliar communities, where the local population are often aware that reintegrees were formally Taliban insurgents, the reintegrees find it difficult to find work of even integrate into the new community:

> "My economic condition has become worse since reintegration. Due to Taliban threats I can't go back to my village, while here I don't have an income or a job."
>
> Reintegree, Muqur district, Badghis province

This leaves reintegrees in a difficult and contradictory position; unable to return home, and yet unable to participate fully in the social and economic life of a new community, and without the means to adequately support themselves or their families.

A number of reintegrees directed further complaints against the government, with a few even claiming to have been wrongly arrested after reintegration.

Reintegrees and Female Participation in the APRP

Reintegrees were frequently critical and sceptical of the potential for a public role for women in the reintegration process, stating that number of obstacles to women's participation existed in communities.

A number of reintegrees stated that women are simply incapable of doing work around reintegration, or of any other social role at all, which is principally the domain of men. In some cases, reintegrees refused to continue answering questions when asked about the role of women. This is an indication of the extremely conservative attitudes of many insurgents and former insurgents; attitudes which do not necessarily change upon reintegration back into civilian life.

Despite this, a great number of reintegrees were favourable to an increased role for women socially and within the APRP, recognising the importance of their participation in establishing long term peace and stability in the country. The reintegrees reinforced statements of the female respondents which emphasised their domestic role in convincing and encouraging insurgents and combatants to join the peace process:

> "My mother always believed and said to me, you should lay down your weapons to the government. This was when I had not joined the peace process. Therefore I say that women can play a vital role in this process."
>
> Reintegree, Pashtun Zarghon district, Herat Province

Again, this emphasises the important domestic role of females in drawing combatants into reintegration activities, as well as the importance given to women's opinions within the domestic sphere. The fact that many insurgents remain in contact with their families while fighting in armed groups, as well as the fact that many join up as a means to support their families, highlights that insurgents are not entirely separated from their families, and the family continues to constitute an important support network for insurgents. Many reintegrees recognised this and called for a higher profile role for women in supporting and encouraging the families of reintegrees:

> "Women build half of society and have a major role in peace process, because the insurgents are their relatives and they can meet with and advise them to join the peace process."
>
> Reintegree, Gozara district, Herat province

Despite this, most of the reintegrees were sceptical of female participation in the APRP more widely. Across the three phases of research, they cited similar obstacles to female involvement, including illiteracy and social attitudes. A number of reintegrees stated that Islam forbids women from taking part in social activities like the APRP, or that women are simply inherently incapable of participating in these complex processes:

> "In my point of view, women must not be given a role. Women are for housework, and if she works outside then there will be no one to do the housework and take care of children."
>
> Reintegree, Muqur district, Badghis province

Additionally, the reintegrees stated that insurgents and Taliban, particularly the more ideologically fervent units that hail from Pakistan, are not willing to sit with females or allow them to "interfere" in reintegration activities. The conservative attitudes of many of these groups, as well as the fact that their members are separated from their families and have little contact with females at all, mean that reaching their members through female relatives is simply not an option. Additionally, the more hard-line insurgent groups would not be willing to meet with females and would certainly not take their advice on board:

> "The challenges are that opposition groups don't let women come out of their houses, so how will they accept women to talk with them? They always say that women must sit in their houses and not come out side."
>
> Reintegree, Baghlan-I Jadid district, Baghlan province

The on-going obstacles to women taking a full and contributing role in the APRP highlight that, although female capacity around advocacy and conflict resolution has increased significantly in many areas over the past year, the Afghan context remains one which is largely hostile to the involvement of women in public life.

Conclusions

The research indicates that the APRP has achieved a number of successes in terms of demobilising militia groups and establishing a basic level of security at the local level, allowing space for economic and social improvements. However, a number of fundamental points around the APRP are also highlighted which could limit its potential successes and impact in the future. There are close ties between reintegration, security, and the economy at the local level, and these three pillars act interdependently to reinforce or weaken one another. Improvements in local economies present more job opportunities and better pay to reintegrees, which in turn lessen the likelihood of conflict recidivism and can help to convince more insurgents to join the peace process. Conversely, improvements in security as local armed groups are increasingly demobilised allow greater scope for improvements in the local economies of communities, through GIRoA and NGO development interventions, and local private sector investment. However, the reverse situation is also possible and the reality in many communities is that struggling local economies drive reintegrees back to their insurgent units (often more out of economic necessity than ideological fervour), while increasing insecurity means that NGOs and the GIRoA are unable to implement community development projects and local businesses falter.

The role of women in reintegration across the country is varied. In some instances, particularly in urban areas of Herat and Kunduz, women peace councils met regularly with both formal government representatives and informal community governance structures and were able, if not to influence the reintegration process, then at least to advocate around issues of concern to women in the community. This has occurred in some areas as a result of PTRO's advocacy training workshops and support to formal and informal women's organisations, which has achieved positive results in terms of improving women's knowledge of their legal rights and capacity to advocate around issues. In other areas, and particularly rural ones, the domestic role of women in the reintegration process was emphasised by all respondent groups, and in this sphere women play a potentially significant role in the success of reintegration.

The APRP continues to be viewed with mixed positive and negative attitudes, even within the same community, by different individuals. Allegations of corruption and nepotism continue to surround the process in many areas, which limit its acceptability in the eyes of many community members. Furthermore, concerns around the credibility of reintegrees means that many communities do not feel comfortable with their presence. This is mirrored by the experiences of many reintegrees, who feel that communities and government representatives are hostile to their presence and continue to deny them access to many services. As such, this represents a lack of progress towards reconciliation at the local level which, in many communities, has been neglected.

It is also clear that further research around the impact of the APRP at the local level is currently required, in order to furnish the GIRoA and international community with a better understanding of the interactions of economics, reintegration, and security in communities. Additionally, greater understanding must be gained of the drivers of reintegration and conflict recidivism, in order to better understand the complex relations between these and local economies.

Key Recommendations

Based on these conclusions, the following groups should take the following steps to maximise the impact of the APRP:

International Donors and Policy Makers

o **Greater alignment between development objectives and interventions and the APRP:** Donors should tie more closely developmental interventions to the goals of reintegration and avoiding conflict recidivism. This will provide greater economic opportunities for reintegrees, as well as extending basic service provision into newly accessible areas. Additionally, development projects aimed at communities in which reintegrees live can help offset potential resentment caused by the perception that reintegrees are benefiting more from interventions.

o **Female-targeted interventions:** More interventions targeted specifically towards females must be implemented. Vocational training allows women to contribute more to household incomes, lessening the chance male members of those households will return to insurgent groups to support their families. Care must be taken, however, to ensure that vocational training reflects a genuine need for skills in the community. Additionally, greater training for female relatives of reintegrees, as well as the building of links between families of reintegrees, can help extend support to the families and help them reintegrate their relatives successfully.

o **Extension of reconciliation to the local level:** At present, meaningful reconciliation processes, such as political negotiation, are confined to high-ranking Taliban and other AoG commanders. Extension of reconciliation processes to the community level is necessary if reintegrees are to be meaningfully and sustainably integrated into communities, and existent prejudices and friction are to be overcome.

o **Establish greater understanding of the mechanisms of reintegration:** The research indicates that insurgents join the peace process for a mixture of reasons, often either self-interest (i.e. in response to incentives offered to reintegrate), combat fatigue, or more altruistic reasons (i.e. a desire to see national peace and solidarity). A better understanding of the drivers of reintegration would help the APRP to target its messages and incentives more effectively.

The United Nations

o **Ensure closer oversight of the process:** Monitoring and evaluation mechanisms at the local level can help to counter perceptions of corruption and nepotism within the APRP in certain communities.

o **Ensure gender mainstreaming is prominent in the process:** Although funds and provisions for gender mainstreaming within the APRP do exist, these should be more widely capitalised on to enhance the role of women in the process.

National and International NGO Community

o **Extension of services:** NGOs should capitalise on extended access that emerges in areas in which reintegration takes place to implement economic interventions such as vocational training. This requires paying close attention to the developing security situation in Afghanistan's provinces and responding quickly to newly accessible areas, and establishing a valid presence in these areas that is widely accepted.

o **Continue to work with women in communities:** Training and mentoring of female groups should continue, as well as establishing networks and outreach work to ensure that the families of insurgents and reintegrees have the support they need to assist reintegrees through the process and ensure that recidivism does not take place. Additionally, greater vocational training for women can increase their income generating capacity within the household, lessening the chance that reintegrees will return to their units due to economic pressures.

The Government of Afghanistan

o **More rigorous vetting procedures:** Closer attention must be paid to those reintegrating, and

vetting procedures must be carried out rigorously in order to ensure that armed civilians and local militia groups are not mistakenly included in the reintegration process. This can lead to significant resentment at the local level, as well as disaffection with the APRP and reintegration activities. The SOP for vetting procedures also leaves a great deal of ambiguity which can lead to criminal groups being included in reintegration activities and limits the extent of meaningful reconciliation within local communities; addressing this ambiguity would go a long way to settling many of the internal disputes around the APRP.

o **Emphasise an Afghan-led process:** Emphasise that the process is Afghan led and place it more centrally within a strong programme of state-building activities. This would help to diffuse suspicion around the motives of international and foreign actors engaged in the APRP, as well as strengthening the idea the reintegration constitutes joining the Afghan polity.

o **Build public trust:** Attempt to build trust in the GIRoA on the part of reintegrees and potential reintegrees. This can be done by ensuring that promises made to reintegrees are kept. This includes employment, payment, and providing security. The GIRoA must take care, however, that this does not lead to resentment amongst other community members. Additionally, the conditions of reintegration must be closely monitored to ensure that local government bodies and representatives do not extend promises to insurgents that they are not in a position to follow through. Additionally, ensuring that government bodies at the local level do not extend promises to insurgents that they are unable to follow through on is important in ensuring that reintegrees do not become disillusioned with the government.

o **Build female capacity:** The capacity of women at the local level must be built to allow a greater role in the APRP. PTRO's workshops and training sessions proved to be effective in building the awareness of females of the ways in which they can contribute to reintegration activities, such as advising family members to leave insurgent groups. Case studies show that this can be an effective means of drawing combatants away from their insurgent groups.

o **Extension of services:** The GIRoA should quickly extend government services into areas which have become safer with reintegration activities. This will enhance the credibility of the GIRoA in these as well showing that the GIRoA has the capacity to provide for reintegrees and communities more widely. Additionally, the GIRoA must ensure that reintegrees are not discriminated against and have full access to any government services they might require.

o **Targeting commanders for reintegration:** Commanders of militia and insurgent units should be targeted for reintegration, rather than individual combatants. This has proven to be more effective in recruiting larger numbers of insurgents for reintegration, as well as de-fusing the threat posed by militias in many areas – which can remain even when widespread demobilisation has taken place if militia commanders are not adequately engaged in the process. Additionally, meaningful negotiations with insurgent group commanders based in Pakistan, via the government of Pakistan, should continue and be strengthened. It is only by reconciling commanders of the larger and more dangerous insurgents groups that the process will achieve its ambitious goals. Furthermore, the continued existence of armed militias with local commanders could pose a significant danger as transition continues through 2014, particularly in areas where the government is less able to project the rule of law.

o **Strengthening grievance resolution mechanisms for reintegrees:** The research shows that many former combatants still refer to their old unit commanders for grievance resolution even after reintegration. Many are unable or unwilling to use GIRoA grievance resolution mechanisms as they feel they are labelled as Taliban. Extending the provision of government services and grievance resolution mechanisms to reintegrees can help in breaking the existent ties between members of armed group, lessen the dependence of reintegrees on their former commanders, and ensure that demobilisation is completed as fully as possible.

o **Counter perceptions of corruption and nepotism:** Perceptions that the APRP is dogged with corruption and nepotism in certain areas undermines the credibility and legitimacy of the process. This not only discourages insurgents from joining, but also alienates community members from what is seen to be a process run for the political benefit of powerful groups. Countering these perceptions, and

ensuring that the programme is transparent and subject to sufficient oversight, is essential to its long-term success. More rigid and closely observed monitoring and evaluation structures could help in this.

- **Provide security for reintegrees:** Although the security of reintegrees is closely tied to the success of the programme and meaningful reconciliation at the local level, provision of more effective security for reintegrees is necessary to ensure that the former insurgents do not become alienated and disillusioned with the reintegration process. Providing this security to reintegrees is fraught with difficulties: arming them can create resentment within communities as well as increasing the chances of further conflict or recidivism, while providing extra ANSF protection can also lead to resentment. However, making local government bodies and security apparatuses more responsive to the needs of reintegrees could help in ensuring that they are not targeted by their former insurgent units. Additionally, steps must be taken to ensure that local police units do not harass or intimidate reintegrees.
- **Dissemination of information:** At present, dissemination of information about the APRP and reintegration is being effectively achieved through media such as radio and television. This appears to work well in urban areas and although individuals' knowledge of the details of the process is uneven, community members make use of these media as sources of information. In more rural and remote areas, however, use of other information channels should be made. These include local preachers, Imams, and mosques. Capitalising on these informal information dissemination networks, and ensuring that they give the correct information to community members, can help spread information that can improve the participation of community members in rural areas.

Annex 1: Glossary of Terms

ALP: Afghan Local Police
ANA: Afghan National Army
ANP: Afghan National Police
AOG: Armed Opposition Groups
APRP: Afghan Peace and Reintegration Process
DDR: Disarmament, Demobilisation, and Reintegration
GIRoA: Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan
HPC: High Peace Council
IMF: International Military Forces
ISAF: International Security Assistance Force
MoLSAMD: Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs, Martyrs, and the Disabled
PRIO: Peace Research Institute, Olso
PTRO: Peace Training and Research Organisation
PPRC: Provincial Peace and Reconciliation Council
SOP: Standard Operating Procedure
SSR: Security Sector Reform
USIP: United States Institute of Peace

Annex 2: Questionnaires

Interviews with Women

Name:
Province:
District:
Village:
Ethnicity:
Age:
Profession:
Level of Education:

Reintegration with your community:

1) Do you still feel the reintegration process is a positive process in your community?
   a. If yes, why?
   b. How have your feelings changed during the past 6 months?
2) What positive impact have the reintegration activities had in the last 6 months within your community?
3) What negative impact have the reintegration activities had in the last 6 months within your community?
4) Have more reintegrees returned to your community in the last 6 months?
   a. Did you have an opportunity to accept or reject the reintegrees?
   b. Did anyone explain the steps in the reintegration process before reintegration occurred?
5) Has the economic situation in the community changed since the reintegration process began?
   a. If yes, what has changed?
6) Do you feel the reintegration process has impacted the delivery of government services within your community?
   a. If yes, how?
7) Have there been any conflicts between the reintegrees and the community?
   a. If yes, what was the cause?
   b. Who mediates the conflicts?
8) What projects have been offered to your community as part of the reintegration process??
   a. Do you think the process has been fair?

The role of women in reintegration:

9) What role are women currently playing in the reintegration process?
10) Has the role of women in the reintegration process changed in the last 6 months?
   a. If yes, is this a result of activities for the Women and the APRP programme (women's shuras, mentoring, advocacy planning etc.)
11) Have the number of meetings you have had with the provincial peace and reintegration council (PPPC) increased in the past 6 months?
   a. If yes, what were these meetings about?
   b. Did the meetings create any change? If yes, what?
12) What is your overall opinion of the provincial peace and reintegration council in your province?
13) Have women in the community increased their involvement in community decision-making over the last 6-months?
   a. If yes, is this a result of activities for the Women and the APRP programme (women's shuras, mentoring, advocacy planning etc.)?
14) What are the main obstacles to the involvement of women in community decision-making?
   a. Are these the same obstacles that there were 6 months ago, or are there new barriers to participation?

15) What role do you directly play in decision making?
16) Do you have a role in resolving conflicts within your community?
17) How often do you meet with the community leader to discuss issues of your community?
18) What issues have you brought to community leaders?
19) What issues would you like to bring to community leaders, but so far have not?
    a. If there are problems that you have not addressed with local leaders, what has prevented you from discussing these issues?
20) What further support does your group require?

Looking forward:

21) Are you hopeful that the reintegration process will be successful?
    a. What do you think it will achieve?
22) Has the reintegration process improved over the last 6 months?
    a. If so, in what way?
23) What still needs to be done to improve the reintegration process?
24) How can women help to improve the process?

Interviews with community leaders/government officials

Name:
Province:
District:
Village:
Ethnicity:
Age:
Profession:
Level of Education:
Role in the community:

1) What role do women play in your community?
2) Has women's involvement in community decision-making increased over the last 6 months?
3) What are the main obstacles to women's participation in community decision-making?

Reintegration with your community:

4) Do you feel the reintegration process is a positive process in your community?
    a. If yes, why?
    b. How have your feelings changed during the past 6 months?
5) What positive impact have the reintegration activities had in the last 6 months within your community?
6) What negative impact has the reintegration activities had in the last 6 months within your community?
7) Have more reintegrees returned to your community in the last 6 months?
8) Has the economic situation in the community changed since the reintegration process began?
    a. If yes, what has changed?
9) Do you feel the reintegration process has impacted the delivery of government services within your community?
    a. If yes, how?
10) Has the government become more responsive to community needs due to the reintegration process?
    a. If yes, in what way?
11) Have there been any conflicts between the reintegrees and the community?
    a. If yes, what was the cause?

b. Who mediates the conflicts?

12) What projects have been offered to your community as part of the reintegration process??

a. Do you think the process has been fair?

The role of women in reintegration:

13) What role are women currently playing in the reintegration process?

14) Has the role of women in the reintegration process changed in the last 6 months?

a. If yes, is this a result of activities for the Women and the APRP programme (women's shuras, mentoring, advocacy planning etc.)

15) What are the main obstacles to women's participation in the reintegration process?

a. Are these the same obstacles that there were 6 months ago, or are there new barriers to participation?

16) How many meetings have you had with women in the last 6 months on issues related to reintegration?

17) Are the women groups in your community active in community decision making?

a. If yes, who are the groups?

b. How do they influence community decision making?

c. What activities do they undertake?

d. Have their activities increased over the last 6 months?

i. If yes, what do you think the reason is?

Looking forward:

18) Are you hopeful that the reintegration process will be successful?

a. What do you think it will achieve?

19) Has the reintegration process improved over the last 6 months?

a. If so, in what way?

20) What still needs to be done to improve the reintegration process?

21) How can women help to improve the process?

Interviews with reintegrees

Name:

Province:

District:

Village:

Ethnicity:

Age:

Profession:

Level of Education:

When did you join the reintegration programme?

1) Why did you decided to reintegrate?

2) What grievances did you want resolved by reintegration?

a. Which of these grievances have been solved to your satisfaction?

3) What are you most concerned about now that you are involved in the reintegration process? (Probe: safety)

4) Have you personally been threatened by any resistance groups in the past 6 months?

a. If yes, what was the method of the threat?

i. Direct Threat (in person) ()

ii. Telephone threat ()

iii. Shabnameh or Nightletter ()

iv. Other (specify) ()

v. Would not answer ()

b. What was the main reason for the threat?

5) What have you been provided to date as part of the reintegration process?

a. Do you feel this meets your needs?

6) How has your economic situation changed since you joined the reintegration programme?

i. Improved ()

ii. Stayed the same ()

iii. Got worse ()

iv. Don't know ()

v. Won't answer ()

b. What has caused this change?

7) Are you able to use basic government services such as health care facilities?

8) Can you attend government offices with ease?

a. What stops you attending offices?

i. Offices are closed ()

ii. Offices are understaffed ()

iii. Threats from the Taliban ()

iv. Bribery in the offices ()

v. Other (please specify) ()

vi. Do not know ()

vii. Would not answer ()

9) Are you happy with the government in your district?

a. Why do you feel this way?

10) If you have a dispute where do you seek resolution?

i. Local Shura ()

ii. Formal Courts ()

iii. Local Commanders ()

iv. Taliban ()

v. Local Jirga ()

vi. Local Khan ()

vii. Local Malik ()

viii. Women shura ()

ix. Other () (Who?.....)

11) Have you been in conflict with another member, or members, of your community since you joined the reintegration process?

a. If yes, what was the cause of your conflict?

12) Have these conflicts been resolved successfully?

a. If yes, how were they resolved?

13) Have you referred any cases to the Reintegration council within your district?

a. Do you feel the council is easy to access?

The role of women in reintegration:

14) What do you think the role of women should be in the reintegration?

15) What role are women currently playing in the reintegration process?

16) Has the role of women in the reintegration process changed in the last 6 months?

a. If yes, is this a result of activities for the Women and the APRP programme (women's shuras, mentoring, advocacy planning etc.)

17) What are the main obstacles to women's participation in the reintegration process?

18) Are the women groups in your community active in community decision making?

a. If yes, who are the groups?

b. How do they influence community decision making?

c. What activities do they undertake?

d. Have their activities increased since you joined the reintegration programme?

i. If yes, what do you think the reason is?

19) Will you stay in the reintegration process in the future?

a. If no, why not?

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