

**Planning Meeting  
Kabul, Afghanistan  
March 11, 2015**

**NARRATIVE REPORT**

On Wednesday, March 11, 2015, a half-day planning meeting (seminar) focusing on the topic of “Afghan Women in Policy Research: Roles, Challenges, and Opportunities for Development” was organized by the Organization for Policy Research and Development Studies (DROPS) in the venue offered by the Afghanistan Justice Organization (AJO), in Kabul.

The purpose of this planning meeting was to bring together women from the nascent research community, academia, civil society and government offices to accomplish the following:

1. Start a discourse on the challenges women face in the research community;
2. Design mechanisms for facilitating coordination and communication;
3. Identify opportunities for collaboration amongst female researchers;
4. Create the first platform that brings together and harnesses the efforts of women researchers in a network, called the ‘Afghanistan Network of Women Thinkers and Researchers.’

The seminar participants concluded that constructive gender-balanced and policy oriented research was key to promoting better-informed governance policies in Afghanistan, and during its Decade of Transformation.

**DROPS Seminar Participants**



## **Introduction**

In our planning meeting, discourse was treated as the very essence of social change. Described as a set of values and beliefs that serve to construct social norms, the discourse was given a platform by DROPS in its planning meeting, to shape an understanding that would illustrate both opportunities and constraints in increasing women's presence and voices in Afghanistan's existing research community. The creation of a mechanism able to facilitate coordination and communication amongst female researchers was described as a prerequisite for ensuring that the low number of women in the already nascent research community collaborate effectively so as to maximize the research initiatives they identify. Collaboration was thus treated as a primary outcome of this event, and the creation of the 'Afghanistan Network of Women Thinkers and Researchers' was considered the first achievement of this collaboration.



As Afghanistan enters the 'Decade of Transformation,' DROPS wants to reflect on the roles women have played in facilitating the establishment of good governance, rule of law, human rights, economic development, mass media and security in the country. Upon reflection, we realized that women have had a significant role in shaping this process by assuming key leadership roles in the government, civil society and media. However, a key area in which the role of women has been largely lacking is policy research and academia community in Afghanistan. It seems gender-mainstreaming strategies have neglected to include and build women's capacities in the research, policy, and discourse community. This, we believe, is a critical medium through which women could exert influence over policymakers and impact policymaking, and thereby, every facet of the nation-building process.

To fill this gap, the planning meeting brought together women from diverse fields, including those who work in the research community and those who are outside the community but still hope to contribute to this area. Their expertise and experiences collaboratively helped set the foundation of the first network of women researchers, called 'Afghanistan Network of Women Thinkers and Researchers' [ANoWTaR].

This network will offer a unique opportunity for women who are researchers and thinkers to create a single platform to harness their collective capacities to inform policymakers both inside and outside Afghanistan. It will serve to fill the deep knowledge gaps that states 'in recovery' often struggle with, and to play key roles wherein political institutions are lacking. Creating an enabling space where women can participate in policy dialogue through research and analyses is imperative to bringing a gender perspective on the wide spectrum of issues affecting the state-building process in Afghanistan, stretching from

governance and development to security and sociocultural issues.

### *Opening Session*

#### **Ice-breaker**

The workshop opened with an introduction by the Organization for Policy Research and Development Studies (DROPS) staff member Ms. Mariam Safi, on the work of the managing organization in the field of policy research. She highlighted the importance of this gathering and the need for a network, and proceeded to outline the meeting's goals for the participants. This was followed by an introduction by the Afghanistan Justice Organization (AJO) staff member Ms. Lailuma Nasiri on the work of the host organization in ensuring rule of law.



An ice-breaker activity was conducted by Ms Safi to help the participants to get to know one another: all participants introduced themselves by providing their names, organizational affiliations, and descriptions of their professions.

### *Session One*

#### **What are the issues to be addressed by the host organization during this forum?**

In accordance with one of the meeting's primary goals a discourse was launched, on factors preventing women from assuming roles in the research, think-tank and academia community. The session (also) specifically aimed to investigate the extent to which women have played a role in facilitating good governance in Afghanistan.

In light of Afghanistan's transition into the 'Decade of Transformation' (2014-2024), we reflected on the various roles women have assumed in facilitating the establishment of good governance, rule of law, human rights, economic development, mass media and

security in the country. Upon reflection, it is evident that women have made commendable progress in assuming key roles and positions in these sectors, and have, to an extent, been able to influence governance in Afghanistan.

However, this influence has been largely symbolic, and a key aspect (of developing the role of women) that has been neglected by international gender-mainstreaming strategies is capacity building and empowerment in research, policy formulation and positioning in the discourse community. Women constitute approximately half of Afghanistan's population, and yet their demographic is absent from the existing research and academic community in Afghanistan. DROPS assessed 11 influential research organizations in Kabul, of which 7 had no women in either a junior or senior position, with only 4 boasting one female researcher or M&E person. Further to that, merely one centre in Kabul was identified as having two female researchers in its research staff.

This means that research being produced by local research organizations is entirely gender-biased and lacks a key viewpoint. Thus, in the absence of constructive gender-balanced and policy-oriented research, post-conflict environments, such as that of Afghanistan, to the effort to initiate and promote better-informed governance policies is failing.

### *Session Two*

#### **The objective of the Afghan Network of Women Thinkers and Researchers [ANoWTaR]**

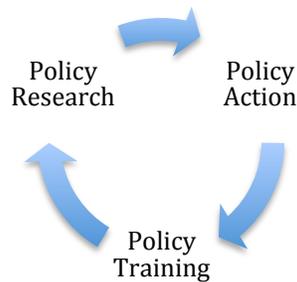
This was used as an opportunity to introduce the idea of developing a network that would bring together women/female students who are currently involved, and or interested, in research and policy discourse. Such a network would aim to increase women's presence and voices in all spheres of research; in particular, policy-oriented research; increase the number of publications authored by women; encourage women to use the gender-lens to write on an array of topics and to break boundaries confining them solely to gender-related issues; and increase women's voices in policy discourse and decision making.



Ms. Shreya Jani explained DROPS' vision, framework and aims for this network, and then opened the session for feedback from the participants at the meeting. The framework of the network has three objectives: (1) produce policy research; (2) carry out Policy Action; and (3) conduct policy training.



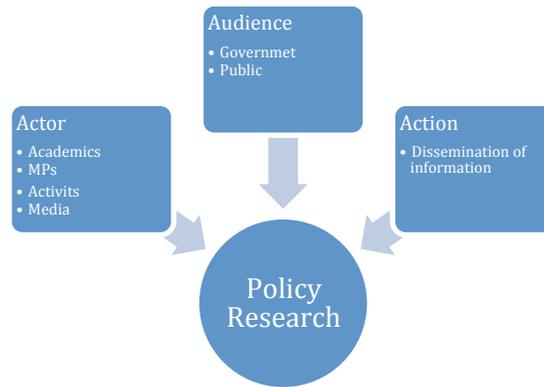
Ms. Jani explained that DROPS viewed the objectives of this network as cyclical, which meant that one objective cannot make an impact on its own without leading or connecting to the other objectives. Thus, an idea/activity can enter from any of the three main objectives but would have to complete the cycle. The network will have three objectives:



In each of the objectives, DROPS has identified a set of actions, actors, and audiences that help inform its activities. The actions are the outcome(s) of the objective; the actors are those who will be key in the production of this outcome; and the audience are the key stakeholders to be targeted by the action(s).

In policy research, we identified the following:

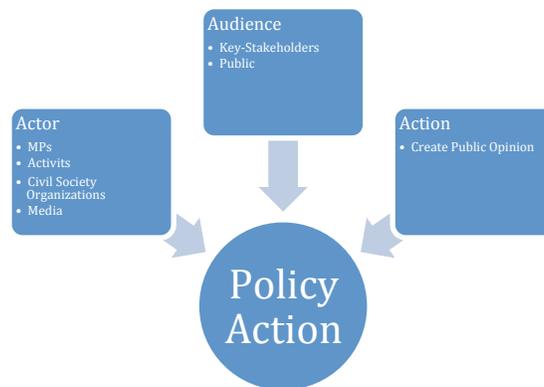
- The actors are comprised of academics, MPs, activists and media.
- The audience are comprised of intended recipients of the research, and are members of the general public and government. This research is different from other, donor-driven research; it is people-driven and thus will also be disseminated to the public. The objective of the research is to determine which problems the research could tackle; so by extension, to see what people need, and then implement solutions to the relevant problems.
- The ‘action’ is the dissemination or spreading the information to our identified audience(s).



However, producing research alone is not enough. The research should lead to some kind of change, so it is crucial to identify what types of actions must be taken.

In policy action we identified the following:

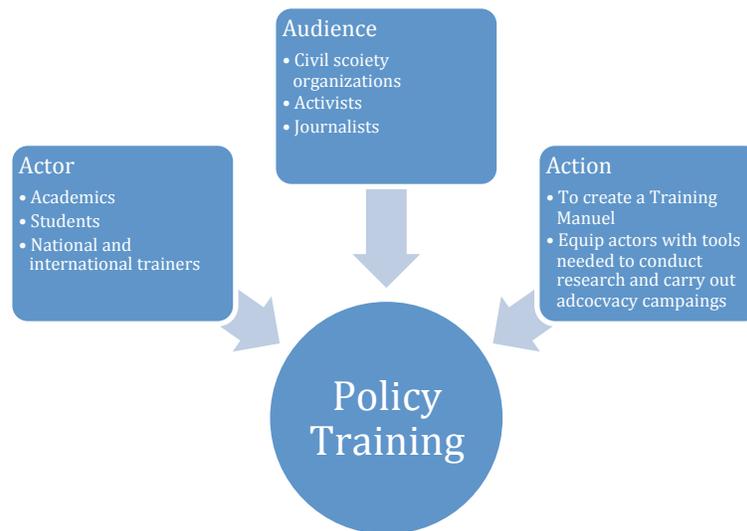
- The actors are comprised of MPs, media, CSOs and activists. This category remains by and large the same as above. These actors will be responsible for taking our policy research to a specific set of key stakeholders that constitute our audience.
- The audience will be composed of the key stakeholders at whom the research is directed. They will *de facto* be impacted by the research, and/or be in a position to take that research and use it to impact others.
- The ‘action’ will be the key stakeholders; taking the research and using it to inform, and create public opinion.



Similarly, in policy training, we identify areas in which we can hone the skills and abilities of actors involved in policy research and policy action so as to equip them with the necessary training needed to carry out the actions involved in (a) producing research, and (b) advocating that the research informs policymakers.

In policy training, we identified the following:

- The actors are comprised of academics, students, national and international trainers. These actors will be best suited to provide the trainings required and identified.
- The audience can be comprised of civil society, journalists, and activists who would be suited for the training provided and who are key in assisting the ‘Policy Research’ and ‘Policy Action’ objectives of the network.
- The ‘action’ will be to create a training manual specific to Afghanistan’s context on how to conduct research, and on how to develop advocacy campaigns to take recommendations of our research findings to a larger audience of stakeholders.



### *Session Three* **Group work**

The participants were asked for their input and suggestions on how DROPS could, in collaboration with the participants, identify priority areas for each of the three objectives that could help inform the way forward for the network.



Ms. Jani asked the participants to divide themselves into groups of three, with each group being given an outline of the network’s objectives to fill in with actors, actions and audiences. The aim of this session was to create a participatory environment where each participant felt like an equal stakeholders in the creation of the network.

Participant were encouraged to brainstorm what the framework mentioned above would look like in reality. Ms. Jani explained to the participants that, as members of this network, it was important for them to jointly identify the kinds of research, actions and trainings they would like to see the network carry out in the coming year. This exercise was intended to help establish a set of priorities for the network, to take on going forward; and to give DROPS leadership a good indication of the primary areas participants felt were in need of the network’s immediate attention. The participants were also encouraged to identify new objectives not already being incorporated by DROPS.

Groups of three were given 20 minutes, after which each group were given the opportunity to present their findings to everyone. DROPS personnel took note of the immediate, mid-term and long-term needs as set out by the groups.



Group 1:

a. Policy Research

Actors	- ANoWTaR - Academics - CSOs - Government policy makers
Actions	- Influence government policies - Change public perception
Audience	- Policymakers

Explanation:

Group 1 proposed that for the network’s Policy Research Objective key actors such as ANoWTaR, academics, CSOs, and policy-makers should be brought together to produce policy papers that aimed to influence government strategies while also changing public perception on key issues.

b. Policy Action

Actors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Media</li> <li>- Activists</li> <li>- Government</li> <li>- CSOs</li> </ul>
Actions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Focus group meetings</li> <li>- Conferences and Symposia</li> <li>- Trainings</li> <li>- Campaign through media and social networks</li> <li>- Spread policy awareness recommendations</li> </ul>
Audience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Public</li> <li>- Government</li> <li>- Parliament</li> <li>- International organizations</li> </ul>

Explanation:

Group 1 proposed that for the network’s Policy Action Objective key actors such as journalists, activists, CSOs, and government office should be brought together to hold focus groups, conferences, trainings, and awareness campaigns that should be geared towards the public, government, parliament and international organizations.

(c) Policy Training

Actors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Media</li> <li>- Networks</li> <li>- Government</li> </ul>
Actions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Create new research departments within the government</li> <li>- Provide training on research methodology</li> <li>- Create manual for schools and universities</li> <li>- Create journals for publishing</li> </ul>
Audience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Government [lobby government staff, manuals, budget, donors]</li> </ul>

Explanation:

Group 1 proposed that for the network’s Policy Training Objective key actors such as journalists, networks and government office should be brought together to push policy makers to develop research departments within all ministries, provide training to the staff in these departments on research methodology and develop a manual for schools and universities on research methodology so they can lead to the development of more journals and academic publications in Afghanistan. According to Group 1, these efforts should be geared towards the government.

## Group 2:

### (a) Policy Research

Actors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Donor agencies</li><li>- Government</li><li>- Private sector</li><li>- Minorities/disabled people</li></ul>
Actions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Support policy development</li><li>- Advocate for policy implementation</li></ul>
Audience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Public</li></ul>

#### Explanation:

Group 2 proposed that for the network's Policy Research Objective key actors such as donors, government office, private sector and minority groups should be brought together to support policy development and advocate for policy implementation in all sectors that relate directly to the public. According to Group 2, these programs should be geared towards the public.

### (b) Policy Advocacy

Actors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- CSOs</li><li>- MPs</li><li>- Social movement groups</li></ul>
Actions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Hold informational gatherings</li><li>- Hold conferences</li><li>- Organize meetings with government officials</li><li>- Support book/journal Publication</li><li>- Use social media and networking sites</li><li>- Create documentaries</li><li>- Establish community awareness programs</li></ul>
Audience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Government</li><li>- Public</li><li>- International community</li></ul>

#### Explanation:

Group 2 proposed that for the network's Policy Advocacy Objective key actors such as CSOs, the parliament and social movement groups should be brought to gather to hold awareness events, conferences, meetings with government officials, utilize social media sites, produce journals, and create documentaries that are geared towards the government and public in addition to the international community.

(c) Policy Training

Actors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- All Ministries and their Directorates in the provinces [Department of Planning and Policy]</li> <li>- CSOs</li> <li>- Media outlooks</li> <li>- International community</li> <li>- Universities</li> <li>- Ministry of Education</li> </ul>
Actions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Hold workshops</li> <li>- Reach out to media: Talk shows</li> <li>- Update school curricula</li> <li>- Raise community awareness</li> <li>- Approach government research institutions</li> </ul>
Audience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Policy and Planning Departments of all Ministries</li> <li>- CSOs</li> <li>- Universities (student body)</li> </ul>

Explanation:

Group 2 proposed that for the network’s Policy Training Objective key actors such as ministries and their provincial directorates, the Department of Planning and Policy (which exists in each ministry), CSOs, Media outlooks, and International community should be brought together to combine their expertise so to organize workshops, reach out to the media, update school curricula, and raise community awareness. According to Group 2, these efforts should be aimed at the Policy and Planning Departments of all Ministries, CSOs and Universities.

Group 3:

(a) Policy Research

Actors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Women in media [journalists]</li> <li>- CSOs</li> <li>- MPs</li> <li>- Ulema Shura</li> </ul>
Actions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Write policy paper on gender-mainstreaming in media outlets and media-related organizations</li> </ul>

Audience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Public</li> <li>- Government</li> <li>- Women-led organizations</li> </ul>
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Explanation:

Group 3 proposed that for the network’s Policy Research Objective, key actors such as female journalists, CSOs, parliament members and Ulema Shura should be worked with to write a policy paper on gender-mainstreaming in media and media-related organizations. According to Group 3, these programs should be geared towards the public, government and women-led organizations.

(b) Policy Advocacy

Actors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- TV networks</li> <li>- Radio stations</li> <li>- Print media [magazines,newspapers]</li> </ul>
Actions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Organize workshops</li> <li>- Hold media roundtables</li> <li>- Present live radio talks</li> </ul>
Audience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Public</li> <li>- Government policy makers</li> <li>- Religious scholars</li> </ul>

Explanation:

Group 3 proposed that for the network’s Policy Advocacy Objective, key actors such as TV networks, radio stations and print media should be utilized and brought together to organize workshops, hold media roundtables and present live radio talk shows on women related issues that aim to target the public, policymakers, and religious scholars.

(c) Policy Training

Actors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Female journalists</li> <li>- Radio hosts</li> </ul>
Actions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Hold media training sessions</li> <li>- Hold research training sessions [for journalists]</li> <li>-</li> </ul>
Audience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Women in media</li> </ul>

Explanation:

Group 3 proposed that for the network’s Policy Training Objective, key actors such as female journalists and radio hosts should be brought together to hold media training session and research training session for journalists. The target of these training programs will be women in media.

*Session Four*

**Debriefing of group findings**

After each of the groups was invited to present the priority areas (new actions) they identified for each objective, Ms. Safi started the session four by concluding each group’s findings in a debriefing exercise. All new actions identified by the groups were considered based on how extensive (e.g. in terms of resources and time) each action was. Then, Ms. Safi put them into categories ranging from short-term, medium term, and long term.

Short-term [Immediate Action – 3 Months]	Medium-Term [6 Months – 1 Year]	Long-Term [1 Year – 3 Years]
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Follow-up network meeting</li> <li>➤ Hold workshop for students on research methodology and how to write an analytical article</li> <li>➤ Research on challenges of including women in parliamentary elections</li> <li>➤ Hold workshop for government officials in the Department of Research and Planning on the importance of research; specifically, how to conduct policy research, and how to implement policy</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Create platform for women to perform research and voice policy opinions</li> <li>➤ Write policy paper on necessary changes the Ministry of Education should take into consideration when creating the curriculum for primary and secondary institutions</li> <li>➤ Write policy paper on how media can raise awareness on women’s issues and promote women’s rights</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Provide training to the Department of Research and Planning in all ministries</li> <li>➤ Create documentaries on women’s issues in Afghanistan</li> <li>➤ Create lobbying mechanisms for ANoWTaR to effectively lobby the government on using and promoting more ‘informed’ research</li> <li>➤ Train female journalists on how to use research to promote women’s issues in the media</li> </ul>

<p>research findings</p> <p>➤ Connect ANoWTaR with existing regional networks.</p>		
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*Way Forward*

**ANoWTaR’s future road map**

These actions and priority areas were used to help design the networks for short-term, medium-term, and long-term goals of the network. The first goal mentioned in the short-term category, to have a follow-up network meeting, was discussed at the seminar. Subsequently, a follow-up meeting was scheduled for June 2015. The second goal in the short-term category, to conduct training on research methodology for students, was carried out by DROPS shortly after the seminar.

Ms. Safi explained to the participants that DROPS would take the identified goals and design a roadmap for the network, to be presented to the group in the June follow-up meeting. The roadmap will be finalized, a series of activities to meet the goals will be set, and roles and responsibilities will be divided amongst group members.



*Evaluation Report*

**Sticky-note exercise**

The planning meeting closed with an evaluation-and-feedback session, in which participants shared their learnings and provided input to DROPS on changes that could be made, along with recommendations for future interactions.

The planning meeting included the participation of 10 women representing Delhi. The diversity of the group (in terms of representation of different sectors, in addition to religions, ethnicities and sects) was a core strength of the meeting. In their observations, many participants also commented on this—particularly with respect to how this diversity in profiles and backgrounds of the participants enriched the learning process.

Learning and takeaways:

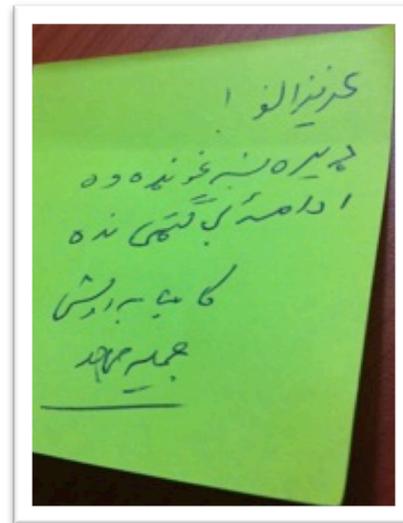
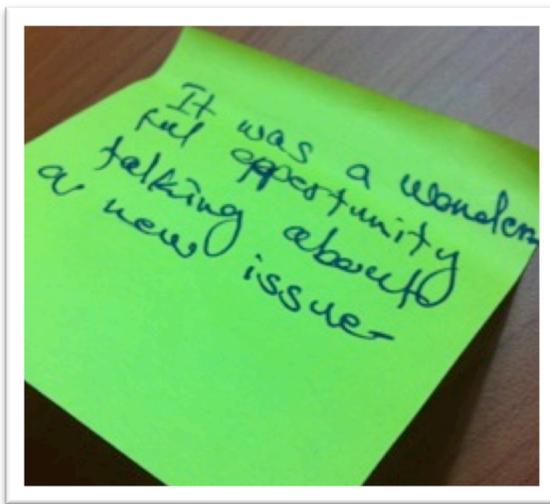
Participants reported on the diverse learning derived from the planning meeting. The majority of these were rooted in the uniqueness of the network, and in the topics evaluated and discussed (i.e. the role of women in research). All of the participants were quick to highlight that they had never previously participated in a meeting that discussed women’s roles and challenges in the research community. They noted that research was

fundamental to informed policymaking, and that this important element was missing from the discourse circles in both the government and in the CSO community in Afghanistan.

The participants were given stickynotes at the end of the planning meeting to write either using just one word or a sentence describing how they felt about the planning meeting and its proceedings. The feedback was both very positive and encouraging.

In the post-meeting stickynote exercise, participants wrote a number of statements in their stickynotes regarding what they felt and learned from the interaction (or what they saw as the accomplishments of the meeting). Given below is a holistic summary of those statements:

- Most participants urged DROPS to continue its efforts to strengthen the network and hold the follow-up meeting in the immediate future.
- Participants hoped the network would set more targets and strive to meet them in its short-term, medium-term and long-term roadmap.
- Participants asked DROPS to engage more actors and students in the network.
- Others expressed how ‘useful’ the meeting was, as it developed solutions to proposed challenges from the main stakeholders themselves.
- Participants felt the issues discussed were very new and relevant, and required further evaluation in future meetings.



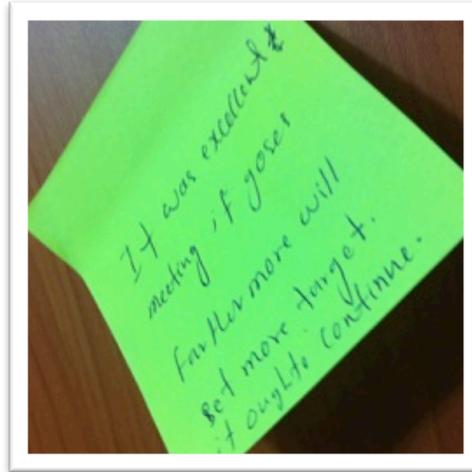
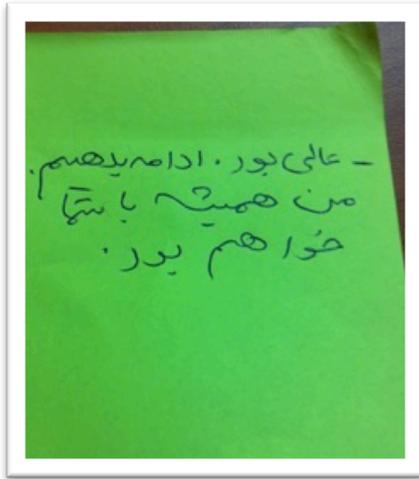
Useful session coz among solutions comes from the main stakeholders themselves  
I recommend if next meetings are discussed over virtual platforms as well, letting it open, the agenda,

بہتر سیشن کیونکہ اس میں حل ان کے ذہنوں سے نکلتے ہیں جو اصل میں حل دہندگان ہیں  
میں نے تجویز کی ہے کہ اگر ممکن ہو تو  
اگلی ملاقاتوں کو ویڈیو کنفرانس پر لایا جائے تاکہ  
اجنڈا اور اس کے بارے میں گفتگو آسان ہو سکے  
با احترام  
فریڈا ڈیوڈ

- please continue follow up meetings - engage more actors and students networks,  
thanks Freshley Nehan

learned alot  
want to  
continue.

- Continue effort
- Time for discussions
- Followup meetings



### Planning meeting design

Interestingly, the methodology for interaction that DROPS used for conducting the sessions received extremely positive feedback. In fact, the use of creative methodologies such as the workshop exercise helped the facilitators and the participants reap all the benefits of the topics that were discussed, opened the network's agenda for suggestions, and created a new set of priorities that will help guide the network's future actions. Not only did the workshop enable participants to learn about one another on a 'deeper' level, but it also created an enabling context where all participants were able to speak without inhibition.



*Concept note of seminar:*

**Planning Meeting:  
Afghanistan Network of Women Thinkers and Researchers [ANoWTaR]  
“Afghan Women in Policy Research: Roles, Challenges, and Opportunities for  
Development”**

11<sup>th</sup> March 2015, at the Afghanistan Justice Organization

The Organization for Policy Research and Development Studies (DROPS) in collaboration with the Afghanistan Justice Organization (AJO), would like to invite you to its planning meeting on, **“Afghan Women in Policy Research: Roles, Challenges, and Opportunities for Development,”** on 11<sup>th</sup> March 2015, held at AJO.

As we enter the ‘Decade of Transformation,’ we reflect on the various roles women have played in facilitating the establishment of good governance, rule of law, human rights, economic development, mass media and security in Afghanistan. Upon reflection we see that women have had a significant role in shaping this process by assuming key leadership roles in the government, civil society and media. However, a key area in which women’s role are largely absent is the policy research and academia community in Afghanistan. It seems gender-mainstreaming strategies have neglected to include and build women’s capacities in the research, policy, and discourse community. This, we believe is a critical medium through which women could exude tremendous influence over policy makers and thus the nation-building process.

In the light of the above, our planning meeting will seek to discuss the existing gaps in the research community in Afghanistan and establish a forum that will, for the first time, bring together the nascent community of female researchers in Kabul to:

- Start a discourse around the challenges women face in the researcher community;
- Design mechanisms for better coordination and communication;
- Identify opportunities for collaboration;
- Launch the process of creating the ‘Afghanistan Network of Women Thinkers and Researchers’ [ANoWTaR]

The aim of this planning meeting is to bring together women researchers, academics and analysts from diverse fields to combine their expertise and experiences. We hope to use this meeting to start a dialogue amongst women researchers that could help set the foundation for the establishment of the first network of women researchers, called ‘Afghanistan Network of Women Thinkers and Researchers’ [ANoWTaR]. This network will offer a unique opportunity for women researchers and thinkers to create a single platform that can harness their collective capacities to inform policymakers both inside and outside of Afghanistan.

Creating such an enabling space where women can participate in policy dialogue through research will be imperative to strengthening democratic institutions and help fill the deep knowledge gaps that recovery states often struggle with and serve in key roles where political institutions are lacking.

Agenda of Workshop:

<b>Opening of the Event</b>	<b>2:30</b>	Welcome Remarks
<b>Vision-Statement</b>	<b>2:35 – 3:05</b>	Introduction of the Organization for Policy Research and Development Studies and description of workshop and its intended outcomes.
<b>Participants Discussion</b>	<b>3:05 – 3:35</b>	Group discussion on women’s roles, challenges and opportunities in the research and academic community in Afghanistan.
<b>Participant Feedback and Action Plan</b>	<b>3:35 – 4:05</b>	Participants share insights and ideas on the development of the ‘Afghanistan Network of Women Thinkers and Researchers’ [ANoWTaR].
<b>Wrap-Up</b>	<b>4:05 – 4:10</b>	Concluding remarks and elaboration of future action plan.

*Planning Meeting Press Release:*

**Media Advisory: Planning Meeting**

**“Afghan Women in Policy Research: Roles, Challenges, and Opportunities for Development”**

**March 11, Kabul, Afghanistan** – On Wednesday March 11<sup>th</sup> 2015, a half day planning meeting with focus on the topic of “Afghan Women in Policy Research: Roles, Challenges, and Opportunities for Development” was organized by the Organization for Policy Research and Development studies with the support of the Afghanistan Justice Organization (AJO), held at AJO’s office in Kabul.

The purpose of this planning meeting was to bring together women researchers, academics, and students from the nascent research community in Kabul to:

1. Start a discourse around the challenges women face in the researcher community;
2. Design mechanisms for better coordination and communication;
3. Identify opportunities for collaboration;
4. Launch the process of creating the first platform for women researchers called the ‘Afghanistan Network of Women Thinkers and Researchers.’

The planning meeting stressed that while it was important to underscore women’s progress in assuming key roles and positions in all sectors [ie. good governance, rule of law, human rights, economic development, mass media and security] in the last 14 years, we must also acknowledge that these roles have been largely symbolic and not substantive. Moreover, a key area in women’s development that has been neglected by local and international gender-mainstreaming strategies has been the building of women’s capacities and empowerment in research, policy formulation and discourse community. The meeting noted that this gap has meant that research being produced by local research organizations is entirely gender-bias and lacks a key viewpoint.

The seminar participants concluded that constructive gender-balanced and policy oriented research was key to promoting better-informed governance policies in Afghanistan, and during its Decade of Transformation.

Participants at the meeting, together with the Executive Director of DROPS, Mariam Safi and Vice President of AJO, Ms. Lailuma Nasiri, used this platform to launch the ‘Afghanistan Network of Women Thinkers and Researchers.’ A first of its kind, this network was praised by the participants as key platform that will help raise women’s voices and presence in policy discourse. The participants, as the first members of this

network, committed themselves to meeting the network's 3 key objectives of carrying out Policy Research, Policy Action, and Policy Training.

DROPS invites members of the media and civil society to publish this press release and help DROPS raise awareness around the importance of the 'Afghanistan Network of Women Thinkers and Researchers.'

**About Organization for Policy Research and Development Studies (DROPS)**

The Organization for Policy Research and Development Studies (DROPS) is a Afghanistan based organization that is committed to strengthening democratic ideas and values by producing research that can provide policymakers with sound alternative solutions to national issues. As an interdisciplinary and independent research-oriented non-governmental organization, DROPS' goal is to facilitate and encourage Afghanistan's transition to democratic governance by aiming to (1) produce policy-relevant research that provides information and makes available resources to decision-makers at the national and subnational levels, particularly the Upper and Lower Houses of the National Assembly; and (2) increase women's involvement in policy dialogue and research on a diversity of issues that are at play in building democratic governance. At DROPS, our core beliefs are: "what we find changes who we become; innovation through research; understanding today for a better tomorrow." In order to enable this mission, we focus on producing public policy research, building local capacities in conducting evidence based research, and advocating key research findings to bring about national and regional transformation.