

- attitudes and behaviour will take a long period of time and effort;
- ♦ the burqa is not considered a major problem for most Afghan women with whom the Mission spoke, but is treated as such by many assistance workers in the country, agency personnel at headquarters and sometimes, opinion-makers outside the country;
  - ♦ in the absence of customary interlocutors in a central government, assistance agencies have been at a loss and have not pursued opportunities creatively in localities;
  - ♦ recent edicts appear to have had fewer direct and pernicious effects in rural areas than in urban localities, but assistance programming has not taken advantage of the programming opportunities that a less restrictive atmosphere may present;
  - ♦ women are often viewed as passive beneficiaries rather than active participants in assistance, by agencies, NGOs and Afghan authorities alike, and their participation in decision-making is very limited;
  - ♦ in policy terms, there is little understanding of the short or long-term goals of gender mainstreaming in assistance programmes, and equally little understanding of the crucial relationship between mainstreaming, on the one hand, and the need for transitional women-specific programming on the other;
  - ♦ although women have customarily had less access to health care services than men, edicts restricting women's work have adversely affected the delivery of health services; where these edicts have been reversed, major obstacles to female health care remain, including the interruption of training of female physicians, the reduced number of female practitioners due to migration, and the absence of health care infrastructure to meet women's needs; rehabilitating the health care infrastructure is as critical a need as providing emergency care;
  - ♦ reproductive health care needs — which constitute 30 to 40 per cent of women's health care problems — are largely ignored in assistance programmes; traditional preferences for the survival of sons has reduced the value of life for women and girls and increased the disease burden of women;
  - ♦ educational opportunities for girls and young women are sharply constrained; traditional low school enrolments due to the favouring of sons has been compounded by recent bans on girls' education; the disparity between female and male literacy rates is therefore growing; bans on female employment have reduced the capacities of a seriously compromised education system;
  - ♦ edicts banning women's work and limiting their movement and free association violate their human rights, and as a corollary, threaten their economic well-being and contributes to the decline in national human capital resources;
- ♦ UN agencies and their implementing partners remain uncertain about their roles in promoting gender equality; there is considerable difference of opinion, and noticeable tension among these partners;
  - ♦ the principles that should frame gender concerns in assistance are not formulated clearly or consistently;
  - ♦ despite the attention paid to discrimination against women, and lip service to their importance in rehabilitation and development assistance, most programmes and projects ignore women at all stages of their design and implementation; women-specific projects are not designed in consultation with women; assistance has paradoxically tended to lock women into traditional and unchanging roles while simultaneously raising expectations about the prospective success of projects;
  - ♦ UN staff are notably unprepared to confront the challenges of reversing gender discrimination; few agencies ensure accountability for gender sensitivity or reward responsiveness to gender concerns;
  - ♦ the recruitment of international women staff to serve in Afghanistan is undertaken in a disjointed and contradictory manner, noting that Afghan women can work only where there are international women staff; the practices of various agencies concerning the segregation of UN premises — seemingly in response to edicts — contravene agreements on privileges and immunities under international law; despite a UN system-wide effort to recruit, train and place senior female staff, many agencies working in Afghanistan have ignored these requirements; and
  - ♦ the recruitment of women UN Volunteers (UNVs) should only be undertaken where there are one or more senior international women staff members on a gender-balanced team since UNVs can neither supervise others nor take major decisions in accordance with the terms of their contract; under no circumstances should UNVs be used as substitutes for professional international women staff.
- The Mission produced a number recommendations, including that:
- ♦ the UN and its partners require a consistent gender policy for working in Afghanistan; an interagency mechanism for coordination and collaboration be created at the field level to monitor the implementation of the gender policy and related activities;
  - ♦ the importance of the principle-centred approach to gender be underscored by a field-oriented application that emphasizes practical, people-centred, process-driven assistance
  - ♦ each agency prepare a gender action plan, including mechanisms for accountability, monitoring and evaluation, and the allocation of human and financial resources;