

the discriminatory policies of Afghan authorities have not (or have not necessarily) been altered in response to this form of conditionality;

- flexible application: emphasizing the alleviation of suffering and concentrating on immediate survival needs and on selected longer-term rehabilitation assistance – without the imposition of any conditionality; called “business as usual”, the method appears to offer assistance without regard to changing the behaviour of authorities so that rights are promoted and protected; and
- field-oriented application: applying the principles within the context of a practical, people-centred approach to assistance; “equality” is interpreted as a process – within strict time limits – by which women and girls would gain equality in participation and benefits, although the interpretation of equality would depend on circumstances and the creative implementation of assistance programmes; when and where discrimination remains a deliberate policy of the authorities, however, conditionalities would be imposed.

The Mission recommended the field-oriented application as the most fruitful way to implement the principle-centred approach but also noted that it requires not only continuing dialogue among agencies, participants, beneficiaries and authorities, but also greater flexibility delegated to field staff so that its own assessments can be used to adjust projects and programmes.

Socio-economic conditions are noted as including: at any one time, thousands of internally displaced persons living away from their homes and lands; more than 2 million refugees outside the country’s borders; development of a pattern of cross-border migration as fighting shifts from area to area; when last calculated, the per capita income was estimated to be US\$280.00; according to the Human Development Index (HDI), and the Gender Disparity Index (GDI), the maternal mortality is ranked as the second highest in the world – women are known to have up to 22 pregnancies with average live births estimated to be 6.9; only 12 per cent of women have access to even the most basic health care; ten million landmines and other unexploded ordnance cause at least 10 people to die or be injured daily; infrastructure in most of the country – ranging from rural irrigation to urban sanitation systems, and transport and communications systems in all regions – has been destroyed, or is in only a rudimentary stage of recovery; the burqa, a traditional dress code, has been imposed on all women; women’s freedom of movement has been restricted; and, there are prohibitions on women’s access to health and education facilities as well as bans on their working in agriculture and livestock production.

The report states that the situation of girls and women in Afghanistan is defined by two primary factors – deprivations caused by continuing war, and policies directed toward the removal of women from public life, and by two secondary factors – traditional customs that often

reinforce their secondary status, and assistance programming that fails to mainstream women. The cumulative result is to reduce the capacities, powers and rights of women to define the conditions of their existence in a society that is already profoundly at risk. The Mission found that women were unable to enjoy even the most basic rights as set out in various human rights instruments, namely: civil and political rights, the right to education, employment, health, movement and personal security, the right to hold and dispose of property, and freedom of association. The report states: the most obvious effects of Taliban policies are edicts that ban women from meeting in public places; women are marginalized in virtually all sectors of life, from the workplace to the marketplace; the consequent psychological and social deprivations are compounded by their exclusion from programmes that assist in the rehabilitation of the country.

Under conditions in which the rights of women are violated at almost every turn, the international assistance community has been unable either to redress specific grievances or find ways to engage Afghan communities on those rights issues that require changes of attitude, institutional response and political will.

With regard to UN practices, the report notes, *inter alia*: the absence of gender sensitivity and awareness creates special problems in a hardship duty station like Afghanistan; UN working environments in-country are not gender sensitive – attitudes toward female staff are neither supportive nor co-equal, and expectations in this regard are vague or absent; women-specific projects exist, but there is little awareness that, as mandated by ECOSOC, gender is to be mainstreamed in all projects and programmes; many agencies do not address gender concerns in the design, implementation or monitoring phases of their work; no projects had been undertaken to make a gender perspective explicit, viz. the impact on women and men had not been anticipated, measured or analysed in any phase of project development or execution; few agencies or individuals were aware of the General Assembly’s goal of filling 50 per cent of professional staff with women by the year 2000 and those that are aware of it seem to ignore its application in the field; at the present time, 100 per cent of heads of agency/chiefs of mission and their deputies are men, and no office had the 30 per cent that is deemed a critical mass of female international staff; with regard to Afghanistan, achieving these goals is not simply symbolic; in order for UN programmes to be implemented effectively, female international staff play critical roles, since they provide vital – and often, unique – links to the community; and poor coordination inhibits the development and implementation of appropriate gender policies and practices.

The Mission concluded, *inter alia*, that:

- the condition of the Afghan people is the result of long years of deprivation, war, and competing traditions and cultures; this situation has been compounded by the policies and behaviour of controlling authorities; for this combination of reasons, changing