

GUIDANCE ON ENSURING WOMEN'S SAFE PARTICIPATION IN SURVEYS

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Rationality:

The current conflict and political uncertainty in Afghanistan has clear gendered impacts. Restrictive gender norms and harmful practices are being exacerbated. Women and girls are at risk of further marginalization and being left behind. It is critical that women's voices continue to be consulted, amplified and inform humanitarian decision-making through their participation in humanitarian assessments. Given the current circumstances, it is crucial to assess the specific needs, risks and priorities of women and girls, and constantly update context specific gender analysis for each province. It is important to remember that women and girls in Afghanistan are under constant surveillance and experiencing social policing. First and foremost, the survey strategy must ensure that no harm is done to the women we consult.

Practical Tips:

PERCEPTION AND PROMISES: **Perception:** Do not consider women and girls as vulnerable victims, passive sources of information, or recipients of aid. Treat women with respect and as leaders, change agents, decision-makers and first responders. This is not only an important form of recognition and encouragement from a mental health and psychosocial support perspective, but it will also motivate women and girls to participate in the survey and encourage their peers to do the same. **Promises:** Explain how the survey data will be used to inform advocacy and response programming, including to improve the situation for women and girls. Do not make promises that this survey will change the situation for women and girls. Consider how to manage expectations to avoid frustration and disappointment.

SAFETY FIRST: Always think of the safety of women interviewees at all stages of the assessment. **Partner:** Partner with local civil society and grassroots organizations that represent and target women to reach them in a safe manner. Consider safety, relationships and reputation of stakeholders consulted. **Conflict-Sensitivity:** Be conflict-sensitive – no one is neutral. **Informed Consent:** Always ensure informed consent of the women themselves. Emphasize that no one is required to participate. It's completely voluntary and confidential.

Protection: Ensure confidentiality, data protection, witness and whistle-blower protection and last resort relocation. **Buy-in:** It is important to obtain buy-in from de facto provincial authorities, community leaders/members and male family members to ensure both safety and access.

DISCLOSURES: If a disclosure occurs, respond and refer. **Respond:** Reassure and comfort the person. Do not pry. Listen to them. Believe, and do not judge. Say things like: "I believe you", "It's not your fault", "You deserve to be safe", "You are not alone". **Refer:** Seek their consent to refer their case using the relevant referral system.

METHODOLOGY: How to conduct the interview: it is important to ensure that safety is prioritised when choosing how best to conduct the interview. This should be decided on a case-by-case basis. Interviews could be conducted in person in a safe location such as a women's space, which is close enough to their home to account for restriction of movement/safety risks. This space would need to be accessible to all women. Alternatively, interviews could also be conducted over the phone (ideally using an encrypted line such as Signal or Telegram). Consider using yes/no questions to avoid placing women at risk if their answers are overheard. Interviews could also be conducted through a secure site online (such as Signal instant messaging). When deciding which method to use, safety should be the primary concern. Then consider how best to reach interviewees. **Individual vs Focus Group Discussion (FGD):** When deciding between individual interviews and FGDs, remember women are a diverse group and approaching them as a group in a FGD may mean they are unwilling to disclose data that could compromise their safety within the community due to self-censoring and peer-social policing. **Selection of interviewees:** Make sure sample is representative and includes women from every demographic group. Select interviewees impartially.

QUESTIONNAIRE DESIGN: Generalised Questions: Questions should be general enough to en-

sure respondents feel and are safe to respond. **Women Centered:** Ask questions that put women at the center of your assessment. **Individual level:** Gender analysis should be collected at the individual, rather than household, level. Data will then capture each woman's role, her participation and what she requires to improve well-being, empowerment, security and dignity. **Context Specific:** Adapt survey questions based on the local context and avoid asking questions or using language that is socially sensitive or may risk backlash/harm to women interviewees. **Avoid stereotypes:** Do not ask questions that may apply stereotypes or enhance feelings of victimization. Avoid expressing assumptions or bias of any kind. **Avoid triggering questions:** Do not ask emotional questions that are likely to lead to disclosure of trauma, GBV, child abuse or other protection issues. If disclosure occurs, see advice above under heading "Disclosures". **Seek Disaggregated data:** Ensure questions will result in data that can be disaggregated based on age, sex and disability.

PILOT THE INTERVENTION: Pilot the assessment to obtain an initial overview of risks. Revise the questionnaire before circulating it more broadly.

DATA MANAGEMENT: Data must be anonymised in order to ensure the safety and security of interviewees. Personal information should not be collected at any time.

INTERVIEWER AND INTERVIEWEE SELECTION: Interviewers: When selecting interviewers, ensure that women are interviewed by women enumerators only. **Interviewees: Ensure diverse representation among** interviewees based on gender, age, disability, ethnicity and other relevant diversity and vulnerability factors. This will expand with future rollouts of the assessment. When selecting interviewees, try not to interview the same women and girls repeatedly, especially on sensitive topics. Coordinate with other humanitarian actors and share anonymized data.

INTERVIEWER PREPARATION: Interviewer Training: Ensure all enumerators are trained on: gender age and diversity, appropriate response to disclosures and referrals, protection (GBV and Child protection), PSEA, psychological first aid, conflict sensitivity, gender equality, women's rights and other ethical principles. **Inclusion:** Ensure enumerators are aware of how to avoid discrimination. Ensure inclusion (e.g. for persons with restricted mobility, women with disabilities, older and pregnant women, illiterate women) regarding location, timing and method of interview.