

#### SDC SWISS AGENCY FOR DEVELOPMENT AND COOPERATION – SOUTH ASIA DIVISION

**The Afghan National Army and Police Forces are meant to take over responsibility for security from international forces in 2014. By then, the country should have 170'000 police officers, both male and female. The integration of female police goes back to an SDC initiative that focused on gender-related issues within the framework of the Afghan security reform. So far, 1241 police women have been recruited. The government's goal is to increase this number to 5000 policewomen by 2014. This is a difficult undertaking in a challenging context, although indispensable if Afghanistan wishes to establish a police force that offers equal access to and quality of security services to both men and women.**

Achieving the above-mentioned goal is indeed a monumental challenge. The traditional and cultural taboo of having women in the police force is further compounded by the mindset of policemen who have little awareness of gender issues. Therefore, the 1241 policewomen who were recruited only account for 1% of the entire police force (see box 1); and 60% of them are stationed in the country's capital and largest city, Kabul.

Acutely aware of the shortage of policewomen, the Gender Mainstreaming Unit (GMU) of the Ministry of Interior was created in 2008, and General Shafiqra Quraishi was appointed to be its Director. She emphasizes: *"Currently, there is a huge need for policewomen in the Afghan National Police Force, but unfortunately there are only few women, who show interest in military and police service."*



*Afghan police women at their inauguration ceremony*

So far, the Law and Order Trust Fund for Afghanistan (LOTFA - see box 2) has managed to recruit over 1000 policewomen (see also chart). SDC's contribution turned out to be the initial driving force behind this achievement, making it possible for the Ministry to recruit, train and retain these policewomen. To

appreciate the full impact of this endeavor, one merely has to examine Afghan culture regarding women and such duties. In the male-dominated society of just 50 years ago, any profession, even medicine and nursing, that brought women to the forefront of society was looked down upon, regardless of the urgency and need for such professionals. Even prior to the upheavals of the past 30 years, the role of women in the police force was limited, if not non-existent.

#### **Box 1: Police Recruitment Progress:**

So far, 122'000 police officers, both male and female, have been recruited. The Ministry of Interior announced in February 2011 to increase the number of police officers to 134'000 by March 2012 and 170'000 by the end of 2013. The main reason behind reaching this target is the withdrawal of foreign troops in 2014. This target will enable the Government of Afghanistan to take full responsibility for security from the international troops by 2014.



*General Shafiqra Quraishi, Director of the Department for Gender, Human Rights and Child Rights*

#### **Moving forward step by step**

Despite these stumbling blocks and the understandable reluctance of women to take up a role in ensuring the country's security, it is an issue that has top priority and therefore the government is determined to achieve its goal. LOTFA has started a number of awareness-raising programs in the country's two major languages, Pashto and Dari, using the media to disseminate them. Assistance has also been sought from national and international NGOs focusing on women's issues. LOTFA has also produced billboards, stickers, brochures and short documentaries for broadcasting on television. This information material is also exhibited and distribute to women during recruitment campaigns at venues such as schools. Since authorities are acutely aware of the fact that families are reluctant to send young girls to Kabul for police induction courses, training facilities are being made available in the provinces. As a result, families are now less reticent about allowing their daughters to participate in the required training.

Workshops on gender mainstreaming were also held for the benefit of all departments within the Ministry of Interior and at police headquarters. Under the aegis of the informal platform of the Afghan National Police Women Association (ANPWA), policewomen in Kabul, Herat, Nangarhar and Mazari-i-Sharif hold monthly meetings at which they share their ongoing experiences and concerns, ranging from constraints because of family restrictions and concerns to disappointments in their professional lives because the merit of women is not recognized and their promotion is rare. Afghan policewomen also have their share of sexual harassment. However, General Shafiq Quraishi points out: *“For some time now, we have seen improvement in the behaviour of men with respect to policewomen. We have encountered positive behaviour when we are in our uniform and on duty. The situation is getting better every day and the mentality is changing and evolving positively.”*

**Box 2: The Law and Order Trust Fund (LOTFA):**

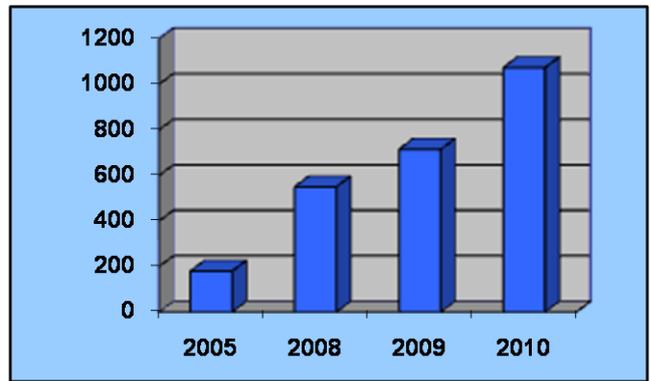
LOTFA was established jointly by the international community in May 2002 at the request of the Government of Afghanistan in order to support the efforts of the government to boost up the overall security situations in the country. The Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) has been providing financial support to LOTFA since 2003. With a donation of approx. 5.4 Mio CHF to date, it has enabled the Ministry of Interior to install an Electronic Payroll System (EPS) throughout Afghanistan’s 34 provinces, as well as to undertake gender enhancement activities.

The main purpose of the EPS system is to ensure accurate and timely salary payments for police staff. Over and above guaranteeing timely salary payments, this electronic capability tracks payrolls, ensures transparency and provides excellent accountability mechanisms. Thus, corrupt managers are prevented from creating false expense charges in the name of “ghost” personnel. The system also provides accurate statistics concerning police workforce and controls recurrent costs and other police-related expenditures.

With regard to gender-related issues, LOTFA launched among other activities a Training of Trainers program in 2009. This venture, considered a flagship effort, was undertaken in collaboration with the International Police Coordination Board and the European Police Mission in Afghanistan. The aim of the project was and is to enforce the rule of law by ending family violence, especially against women and young girls. Under the program, three hundred police were selected from all provinces, and were given the necessary training. Today, these officers constitute a valuable resource base for training other fellow policemen and women within their respective regions.

Apart from Switzerland the donors of LOTFA project are Belgium, Canada, Denmark, European Commission, Finland, Germany, Hungary, Ireland, Japan, the Netherlands, Norway, UNDP, United Kingdom, Australia, United States, Latvia, Iceland, Italy and UK Department for International Development (DFID).

Chart: *Policewomen Recruitment 2005 – 2010, moving forward step by step*



Nevertheless, policewomen are now performing their roles such as assisting their male colleagues in conducting house searches – always a sensitive issue where there are female occupants. As for the issue of widespread domestic violence within a culture where the rule of “keeping silent for the sake of honour” prevails, women are shy and do not file any formal complaints when victimized by a family member, whether husband, father or brother. This problem is further compounded by the knowledge that police stations have a predominantly male environment, making it embarrassing for women to even talk about this matter in a police station. SDC has contributed to addressing this issue by supporting the introduction of “Family Response Units,” staffed exclusively by policewomen. First and foremost, these units are aimed at protecting women from domestic violence. Their duties, however, also include sub-national security services for the safety of women in both their public and private lives. There are 108 Family Response Units throughout the country.



*Visiting a Family Response Unit in Kabul*

**An important contribution to the development of society**

Because of the contribution that policewomen are making to Afghanistan’s overall security, the perception that the population now has of the police force in general and the urgent services they are providing to the female population in particular has changed, making it all the more important to ensure further assistance to this project. By performing a pioneer role in supporting gender-related activities in LOTFA, SDC, which is a relatively small donor

compared to others, has exerted a considerable impact on the future of Afghanistan's security structure.



*Weapons training – equal rights and duties for female and male police officers*

At present, the main duties of policewomen involve administration, logistics and investigations, with specific attention being focused on juvenile crimes. As and when required, these policewomen are also active partners in special operations. It is expected that, in the next five years, they will be able to take up the same responsibilities as their fellow policemen in all areas of security.

The concept of recruiting women in the police force dates back to 1959, when the emancipation of women was first introduced in Afghanistan. The first female cadets were a group of six girls who decided to join the Police Academy where they underwent stringent police training while simultaneously completing their university studies. The contribution made by these six female cadets turned out to be so useful that the Afghan Government at that time tried to encourage a second group of high-school graduates to join the ranks of the police. Of the 80 candidates who submitted their application, 14 were able to pass the Police Academy entrance examination. Of these 14 cadets, only 9 remained in the police force, one of whom is General Aziza Nazari, who is currently the Deputy Chief of the Police Law Department. Like so many other parents, Aziza Nazari's father, though a military man himself, found it difficult to accept her choice of profession. Because she was strong-willed and benefited from the support of an uncle, however, she managed to obtain her father's consent.



*Police training in Kabul*

She admits that life in the police force was not easy, but she persevered. She also pursued her university studies and in 1974, she was awarded a degree in criminal law, psychology and criminology. When analyzing today's situation, General Aziza Nazari stresses the importance of maintaining rigorous enrolment criteria, similar to those put in place when the recruitment of policewomen was initially implemented.

### **Role models**

General Shafiqra Quraishi is another role model for thousands of Afghan women who are determined to do more than just stay at home and depend on others. After she completed 9th grade at school, a friend suggested she could continue to pursue her studies while learning police duties at the Police Academy. In other words, she would get on-the-job training and still have the possibility of getting an education. After an intensive 9-month training as a police cadet, Shafiqra got her first job at Kabul Police Headquarters and was assigned to one of the District Departments where she was responsible for investigation work and administrative duties. Four years later, she was transferred to the women's section of the Pulicharkhi Prison, where she was in charge of criminal and political prisoners. At that time, she started studying again, attending night school and graduating in 1992 from High School. Today, General Shafiqra Quraishi is the Director of the Department for Gender, Human Rights and Child Rights and sees the need for policewomen beyond their current working areas: *"In the next five years, we will witness policewomen not only serving vulnerable women in society, but also carrying out other duties similar to those performed by their male counterparts and working in professional areas such as security management."*



*Afghan Police women training for being deployed against violent demonstrators*

There is no doubt that there are challenges facing the Afghan Government and the individual women who wish to be part of the police corps. The Government realizes that it runs a risk of jeopardizing quality standards if too much emphasis is placed on reaching the goal of having 5000 policewomen by 2014, and not enough attention is given to the qualifications required for recruitment. That is why women with little or no educational background are only recruited in the direst of circumstances, in which their presence is required for house searches and other functional jobs. If these

women show a genuine interest in policing and take literacy and educational courses while receiving regular training, it will be a win-win situation for both them and the government. Many of them, however, simply join the police force for the salary. Screening the sincere candidates from the insincere ones is a huge challenge for a government that has limited time and resources. Furthermore, for women it is and will continue to be an up-hill battle on many accounts, not just in terms of the cultural issue of getting their families to give their consent. Male-chauvinism is not new and it continues to be deeply rooted in many aspects of life in Afghanistan. Policewomen have to work doubly hard to earn respect from their male peers. Even then, as witnessed elsewhere in the world, they are often passed over when promotions are awarded and due credit is not given to their achievements.

### **Making progress sustainable**

It is specifically because of the above that General Aziza Nazeri says: *"When conducting the recruitment process, we have to ensure that, in addition to meeting academic requirements, candidates must have enormous psychological endurance capabilities and must be physically fit as well."*



*Female and male police officers receiving instructions during their training*

When asked what lessons have been learned since the LOTFA recruitment initiative for policewomen started in 2003, General Shafiqra Quraishi notes that, in their enthusiasm to encourage women to join the police force, they had not focused an equal amount of thought and planning to the eventual placing of these new recruits in appropriate positions. This has now been rectified. Another point was the lack of training and basic facilities that should have been made available to these women. Such infrastructure has now been provided in Jalalabad as a pilot project and its replication has been planned for the rest of Afghanistan.

A strong advocate of her profession and the role of women in this field, General Shafiqra Quraishi points out that, in addition to the educational opportunities provided by the Police Academy, women can actively participate in promoting security in the country. Policewomen can also help to restore confidence among the people by showing that the duty of a police officer is first and foremost to protect all Afghans, both men and women. General Shafiqra Quraishi emphasizes: *"We must tackle the challenges and problems of our nation. Women must join the police force and work alongside male police officers. We need them in the National Police Force*

*and this is one of the best ways for Afghan women to serve their nation and their people."*



*Afghan counter-narcotics police women preparing for a field exercise*

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### **Links:**

SDC Afghanistan: <http://www.sdc.org.af/>

SDC: <http://www.sdc.admin.ch/>

### **About this Publication**

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