

MANAGEMENT RESPONSE TO HUMAN DIGNITY FOUNDATION'S EVALUATION OF THE 'STRONGER WOMEN, STRONGER AFGHANISTAN' PROGRAMME

Women for Women International

I. INTRODUCTION

In October 2015, Women for Women International (WfWI) received an evaluation report that assessed the impact of a three-year project funded in Afghanistan by the Human Dignity Foundation (HDF). The HDF-commissioned evaluators, Thousand Plateaus (TP), concluded that the project had a limited impact on the women served, and levelled some serious criticisms against WfWI's programme rationale and approach. WfWI acknowledges the validity of many of these negative findings, several of which are reflected in our own recent evaluations, programme learning, and ongoing efforts to upgrade our programmes and systems in Afghanistan and other target countries. Further, while we do not seek to minimise the criticisms in the report, we strongly believe that it presents a very limited understanding of our approach and fails to sufficiently highlight and celebrate the positive achievements that women have made in their lives as a result of this project and in spite of the challenging context in Afghanistan. Thus, while the report raises a number of points from which WfWI intends to learn, it also alludes to the project's human impact, for instance on women's increased confidence and participation in communities or male leaders' high levels of belief in preventing violence against women – and we remain deeply grateful to HDF for its investment in our programme and in creating change for some of the most marginalised women in Afghanistan.

In addition to funding the project in Afghanistan, WfWI's three-year partnership with HDF has honed our own understanding of the depth at which similar donors seek to understand the theoretical foundations of our programmes as well as its results. While this was a difficult report to receive, we do so in the same spirit of learning with which we have engaged with HDF and towards developing a stronger understanding of whether our work is having the desired impact on women's lives. This commitment to learning was recently emphasised as a priority goal in our three-year strategic framework and operational plan (2015-17). As part of this commitment, WfWI participated in a number of evaluations. Specifically:

- Advisem Services Inc. was commissioned to conduct a facilitated, learning-oriented programme evaluation that sought to better grasp the relevance and effectiveness of the training, skills, tools and resources provided to women to achieve our four programme outcomes around income, health and well-being, rights awareness, and social networks and safety nets. The evaluation, completed in March 2015, included fieldwork conducted in Afghanistan, as well as one other programme country, and covered the entire programme, including input from our US headquarters as well as our regional and country offices. The Advisem report represents an investment in our internal development and is intended to guide and inform priority setting and strategy discussions within WfWI¹.
- WfWI was also selected to participate in the Innovations for Poverty Action's (IPA) Goldilocks project, which sought to assess the M&E systems of 10 organisations, and make recommendations on improvements. The IPA evaluation, received in April 2015, involved fieldwork in one other programme country, along with conversations with the Afghanistan M&E staff and HQ staff².
- The Afghanistan Public Policy Research Organisation (APPRO) was commissioned to examine how WfWI's programme in Afghanistan supports women's contributions to social cohesion and economic resilience. The study was completed in October 2015, and we are currently reviewing a draft report³.

This management response is informed by all these three evaluations and seeks, in the first section, to clarify WfWI's programme rationale and approach in light of the limited understanding presented in the TP report. The second section reflects WfWI's strategic thinking and plans to address programme limitations in areas that have been prioritised as a result of the above evaluations, and which echo many of the findings and recommendations in the TP report. The third section summarises WfWI's other considerations on TP's report.

¹ Please see Appendix 1 for a summary of the Advisem evaluation.

² Please see Appendix 2 for a draft of the IPA evaluation. WfWI will share a finalised version when we receive this from IPA.

³ The APPRO evaluation was recently completed and is currently under internal review. We are therefore unable to attach it to this response but are happy to share it with HDF once this process is complete.

II. CLARIFICATIONS ON WFWI'S PROGRAMME RATIONALE AND APPROACH

While WfWI acknowledges that the TP evaluation raises several pertinent and valuable points in keeping with our own strategic areas of improvement, and offers recommendations and learning that we will continue to reflect on and use as we upgrade our programme in Afghanistan and other country programmes -- we strongly believe that the evaluators have developed an incomplete and reductionist understanding of our rationale and approach. Thus, the TP report simplifies these repeatedly to say that WfWI equates women's economic engagement with women's empowerment, and provides unsuitable critiques based on this premise. Further, it makes recurrent attempts to fit our rationale and approach neatly into the Women In Development (WID) paradigm, and claims that WfWI's programme suffers and proves the limitations of this paradigm. In addition and to do this successfully, it repeatedly reduces the social empowerment aspects of our rationale and approach and the Men's Leadership Programme (now the Men's Engagement Programme - MEP) as a surface-level attempt to align our work with the Gender and Development (GAD) approach.

Therefore, this section of WfWI's management response aims to correct and clarify our global approach and programme implementation in Afghanistan. Specifically:

A. WfWI's Programme Rationale and Approach

WfWI's core work centres on the delivery of a holistic year-long social and economic empowerment programme to the most marginalised women in conflict-affected Afghanistan and six other countries. According to WfWI's programme guidelines "to promote social empowerment, WfWI offers women training sessions twice per month on topics related to essential health practices and nutrition, fundamental human and legal rights, household decision-making and participation in civic affairs and advocacy. WfWI creates a safe and comfortable space for women, in groups of 25, to learn, share and support one another to initiate change in their lives. To promote economic empowerment, WfWI offers women training sessions in numeracy, business management basics, planning, selling products in the market, bookkeeping, group business and cooperative management. We provide 40-70 hours of hands-on professional and vocational training in 1 of 5 income generation sectors - handcrafts and manufacturing; agriculture; livestock; food processing; and trade and services." Thus, as outlined in our proposal to HDF and in our programme guidelines, WfWI is focused on building women's skills, knowledge and resources to achieve improvements in the four outcome areas of income and saving; health and wellbeing; rights awareness and decision-making; and social networks and safety nets. To support the achievement of these four outcomes, WfWI has also prioritised the implementation of complementary initiatives in Afghanistan, such as the vital MEP as well as our work with graduates who come together in business-oriented Self Help Groups (SHGs).

B. WfWI Programme Strengths

According to the Advisem evaluation, WfWI "excels at building women's social empowerment and at promoting their leadership and participation" though "results seen in building women's economic empowerment are not quite as good". Moreover, Advisem found that WfWI is "particularly competent at uncovering the types of challenges women face—including family and community stereotypes about what they can or cannot do—and at demonstrating how, with proper support, women can learn and move ahead". Drawing on the TP evaluation, we are delighted to learn that our programme has been successful in reaching the most marginalised women in target communities, confirming the effectiveness of our selection criteria that seeks to enrol the most socially-excluded women into the programme. It also finds that many participants join the programme through referrals from elders, showing the quality of WfWI's relationships within communities and their understanding of our programmes. We are encouraged by the reported practice of family planning by married women, and keen to understand how this reported positive health behaviour relates to the scores on related knowledge questions. The measured levels of self-esteem and self-efficacy among the surveyed women graduates (though limited by the verbal administration of these typically written scales) was also encouraging, as were the high levels of belief in violence prevention demonstrated by male leaders. Perhaps the most positive finding relates to women's strong sense of community and social cohesion, as well as their high sense of ownership for the programme, with many continuing to meet together after the programme. WfWI has observed these particular strengths in Afghanistan and other target countries, and believes that they form a sound basis on which to build and strengthen our Afghanistan programme, most urgently with regards to the economic outcomes but also on its social aspects.

The Advisem evaluation also found through focus group discussions with Afghan male participants that they “broadly attributed their engagement in the MEP to a radical shift in their own perspectives regarding women’s rights within Islam”. Building on learning from other programme countries and the needs of Afghan women, WfWI has also begun to expand the MEP to include male family members in Afghanistan so as to improve outcomes in areas of shared family decision-making. The Advisem evaluation recommends that while rigorous study is required to develop the MEP, we “recognise that WfWI is at a stage where the value of the MEP is confirmed, while the details of how to conduct the MEP are still in an early learning, experimental phase”. In keeping with the spirit of learning more about the MEP, WfWI has commissioned (as part of DFID grant) a longitudinal evaluation conducted over two years in Nigeria (due end-2016), where the MEP has been running the longest. In addition, WfWI has been selected to partner with the South African Medical Research Council and the wider DFID-funded What Works Consortium to conduct an impact evaluation of our work in Afghanistan in reducing the prevalence of violence against women. Study results will be available in 2018 and will explore whether the training programme and MEP contribute to reducing violence against women in target communities, providing critical recommendations on how we can improve this support. The results of these studies will yield rigorous and nuanced findings that will be used to strengthen programming in Afghanistan, Nigeria and other target countries.

C. WfWI Programme in Afghanistan

Notwithstanding the validity of TP’s recommendations around the need to further tailor our curriculum and training, WfWI already does adapt the foundational 12-month curriculum to a significant degree to approach the needs of women in each geographical area in Afghanistan in their own right. As per our proposal to HDF, we conduct a thorough analysis of potential target communities through assessments with women and men to understand the most effective needs and approaches in each geographic area, given the social development and cultural characteristics of that region. We give due regard to province- and community-specific issues as social norms, culture and language differ significantly from Nangarhar to Parwan, from Kapisa to Kabul. In addition, we have a diverse staff group and senior management team in Kabul and in our Jalalabad offices who provide bespoke guidance and information on each ethnic group, language and culture. We always employ local, community-based trainers who speak the local dialect, have relationships with traditional, local and government leaders, and can manage, with ease, local social norms, dynamics and challenges. We utilise a core curriculum of foundational women’s empowerment issues (rights, decision making, health, savings, and so forth) but the adaptation of that content to fit the legal, cultural, and linguistic context is significant and varies by province and district.

Confirming the above, the APPRO evaluation (currently in draft) states: “one important design feature of the WfWI programme that appears to account in part for the programme’s effectiveness is that the training context is tailored to suit the needs of national and local settings”. It goes on to say that Afghan beneficiaries described a myriad of skills and knowledge gained from the programme including numeracy, sewing, embroidery, chicken keeping, baking, stock breeding, dairy and pickle production, first aid skills, saving skills, maternal care, and maintaining personal and family hygiene. The report contends that as a result, women’s behaviours had changed, for example by paying more attention to the healthcare of their children. Interpersonal skills education was also significant to beneficiaries, who were taught behavioural styles to reduce the risk of violence. Notably too, the APPRO report found that the WfWI programme had positive effects on Afghan participants’ sense of their status and decision-making within the household, especially true for the most conservative communities in which WfWI works. The APPRO report also found a strong recognition that women are entitled to inheritance rights, land, and to make decisions concerning marriage and work. Recognition of women’s right to work was significant in mobilising many programme beneficiaries in Afghanistan to make use of the vocational training they received through WfWI. APPRO also notes that there was a discernible connection between the vocational skills that women acquired through participation in the WfWI programme and the means by which they generated income after the programme, most commonly by raising livestock and sewing. Further, they contend that women in Afghanistan were more likely to contribute to household income after the programme than before it.

Taken together, these assertions from our programme framework, Afghan country office, and external evaluations are a direct counterpoint to TP’s contention that WfWI’s approach is an equation of economic engagement with women’s empowerment, or easily aligned with the WID paradigm. Moreover, in spite of challenges and limitations, the social empowerment aspects of our core programme and the MEP should not

be dismissed as a surface-level attempt to align our work with the GAD paradigm. In spite of challenges, limitations and mixed results, WfWI's programme remains a serious attempt to holistically address the challenges that the most socially-excluded women face in the communities where we work in Afghanistan.

III. AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT AND LESSONS LEARNED

While the Advisem, IPA and APPRO evaluations discuss a variety of positive attributes, they also identify a number of areas where strategic improvements are urgently required, many of which are echoed by the TP report. These include:

- Revising and strengthening WfWI's Theory of Change (ToC)
- Localising and expanding WfWI's Programme
- Prioritising support to programme graduates
- Strengthening WfWI's monitoring and evaluation (M&E) systems
- Expanding coordination with external actors

WfWI has begun to make progress on prioritising and responding to these most pertinent areas of change, and we summarise in this section how we are integrating the feedback received and any advances that we have made on adapting our approach towards improving outcomes for the most marginalised women in Afghanistan and our other programme countries. As can be expected, progress is not uniform in all five areas, and our efforts continue to be influenced by funding and staff capacity constraints. Specifically:

A. Revising and Strengthening WfWI's Theory of Change (ToC)

A1. Emerging Challenge: WfWI has found that while our mission to help the most marginalised women in conflict-affected countries achieve change in our four outcome areas is both timely and relevant, there is limited consensus within the organisation on the route by which this mission is to be operationalised – i.e. that our formal ToC, dating back to 2008 and reflected in our HDF proposal, has limited value and applicability, and seems to be open to interpretation. Moreover, the ToC outlines a shift in behavioural change that requires time and ongoing support beyond the 12-month programme, whereas WfWI is only delivering limited support to programme graduates. The theory also underlines women's long-term contributions to community change, even though WfWI's data provides little more than anecdotal evidence of such programme impact on communities. This analysis is echoed by the recommendations in the TP evaluation for WfWI to develop a working definition of empowerment, and interrogate the theoretical foundations of our programmatic approach.

A2. Progress and Plans to Address Challenge: WfWI identified the development of a unified and updated ToC as a priority area of organisational inquiry, and began the process of re-focusing the ToC. Though the larger process is far from complete and goes hand-in-hand with our efforts to improve our approach to monitoring and evaluation, we have made strong progress in clarifying WfWI's vision and revisiting the organisation's ToC to refine the logical framework that connects the identified needs of targeted women, to inputs that the organisation provides, to the outcomes and impact that the organisation aims to deliver.

This progress is reflected in a ToC that WfWI developed to underpin a five-year programme in response to the Dutch government's call for proposals under its Funding Leadership and Opportunities for Women 2016-2020 (FLOW II) programme. Designed in August 2015 by country teams in Afghanistan, Democratic Republic of the Congo and Nigeria as well as our Global Programmes Unit, the programme seeks to combat violence against women and improve economic empowerment for marginalised women in conflict-affected areas. The ToC is grounded in the recognition that the impact we are seeking through this five-year programme requires a package of interrelated interventions that seek to build women's agency at the individual level, and also create a more enabling environment for women within households, communities, and society.

Please see Appendix 3 for a summary ToC submitted to FLOW II. A more detailed analysis is also available so please let us know if this would be of interest.

B. Localising and Expanding WfWI's Programme

B1. Emerging Challenge: WfWI has found that while the 12-month programme generally meets the needs of beneficiaries, especially on the social empowerment side – it is narrowly defined in terms of scope and scale, and follows a standard model and curriculum that leaves some room for flexibility to reflect local realities and address specific needs. We have also found that the balance between flexibility and adherence to the curriculum is generally satisfactory, but our evaluations have captured a number of suggestions from programme participants on how to adapt the curriculum that would make it more context-specific, in line with the recommendations from TP.

B2. Progress and Plans to Address Challenge: Over the past months, each of the WfWI country programmes have been working to tailor the 12-month life skills programme to their particular context. The Afghanistan team, under their Social Empowerment Manager, is developing these adaptations, with emphasis, for example, on women's rights in Islam and critical context-specific health issues. Additionally, WfWI has recently appointed a new country director in Afghanistan who has reviewed the TP evaluation, and will continue to support and guide the adaptation of the curriculum and intensive training of trainers once she takes up this post. Mandana Hendessi, our new country director and former director the Afghanistan Programme of Global Rights, has an impressive track record in women's rights and a depth of relevant experience in the region.

As a global organisation, WfWI has worked to adapt the core curriculum in our other programme countries, and our efforts are informed by learning from these successes. These include:

- WfWI is working with lawyers in Nigeria to provide women with country-specific legal information as part of its rights component or organising civil marriages in Rwanda so that women can benefit from legal access to joint property and custody.
- In Rwanda, the programme explains how the local health insurance system functions and encourages women to use their stipend to sign up and pay the nominal fees that entitle them to free government health care.
- In DRC, women learn about their rights to own and inherit land under local law.

WfWI is also prioritising the use and development of visual aids to improve training in Afghanistan to better reach our predominantly illiterate target population. Thus, through a partnership with local NGO Harakat, WfWI will enrich business skills training by using videos that they have produced. Professionally produced in clear and cartoon-like videos, the trainings cover the business set-up basics through more complicated procedures. These effective materials, produced at great cost, will be freely available to WfWI, through this partnership. We have also applied to the Guernsey Overseas Aid Commission (GOAC) for grant of £38,000 to pilot audio-visual aids in Afghanistan in the four outcome areas. If won, GOAC funds will enable WfWI to professionally produce and screen three five-minute videos in 2016 for each module that follow a heroine "Nazia" through experiences illustrating trainings. Thus, we could find Nazia exploring options to save; understanding pregnancy care; negotiating with her husband for her daughter's education; and joining a support circle in her neighbourhood. WfWI will engage artists to complement videos with printed pictures, an additional tool to encourage discussion during training.

C. Prioritising Support to Programme Graduates

B1. Emerging Challenge: Evidence suggests that numerous factors can affect the sustainability of results achieved by WfWI's programmes, especially on the economic side, such as: time and support needed by women to make some money above the poverty line after exiting the programme; access to mentorship and financial assistance during the critical transition period that follows graduation; and ongoing monitoring of progress made by women who have completed their training. In keeping with the TP evaluation, all these factors point to the need to follow-up extensively with graduates—especially those who start a business—as they try to make it on their own after the programme.

B2. Progress and Plans to Address Challenge: WfWI is considering various means by which to do this, with each country office testing the best way forward and learning from the progress made by other country offices. These include:

- **VSLAs:** One such endeavor is around the systematic introduction of Village Savings and Loan Associations (VSLAs) or their local equivalent in South Asian countries, often called Self-Help Groups (SHGs), which can potentially improve women's savings, management of money, and access to capital. The power of these collective savings and lending opportunities lies not just in their financial value but also in the space they provide to women to develop self-confidence, learn to work effectively in groups and networks, exercise principles of good governance, and strengthen their capacity to negotiate. WfWI has piloted VSLAs in DRC in 2015 to anecdotal success, and is exploring the possibility of introducing the local equivalent of such structures in our Afghanistan programme, tailoring it to the particular context. To this end, the Afghanistan team has reached out to relevant ministries and potential advisers, such as the Ministry of Rural and Rehabilitation in Parwan as well as Care International in Kabul, to understand how best to implement these for our women. Two members of the Afghanistan team have also received a 15-day training in establishing SHGs in India. We hope to pilot a context-specific community-led savings and lending model in Afghanistan in 2015-16, and track the impact.
- **Business-Oriented Groups:** Another area of ongoing support is around business-oriented groups established by programme graduates in Afghanistan. As a start, the Afghanistan team is supporting women who have gathered in groups to pool funding to purchase bulk inputs for their small group businesses, so they can get lower prices. WfWI has also established a partnership with Zardozi, and is piloting advanced business training and linkages to markets to these nascent groups through this partnership. As extending support to graduates significantly increases our costs, WfWI is seeking to raise funds for this work. The FLOW II programme proposal referenced above includes between six and twelve months of post-graduate support to these groups to help them establish themselves as viable businesses in Afghanistan.

As a global organisation, WfWI has been prioritising and piloting services for graduates in our other target countries as well. These include:

- ongoing support to women's associations in Bosnia to increase civic participation;
- support to cooperatives in Nigeria;
- the establishment of a Job Placement Office in Kosovo to assist graduates with formal employment in the service industry;
- plans to train women in advanced business skills, business plan development and business advisory services in Rwanda in 2016.

Drawing on lessons learned from these initiatives, WfWI will strive to build up graduate services in Afghanistan under the leadership of its new Country Director.

D. Strengthening WfWI's Approach to Monitoring and Evaluation

D1. Emerging Challenge: WfWI's strong organisational focus on learning led it to identify the critical need to improve its M&E in 2013, and to raise and dedicate funds towards improvements in this area. In keeping with TP, WfWI also concluded that while we can capture statistics on results achieved, these are of limited value as currently compiled and are not put to optimal use. Moreover, that we have limited capacity to measure the quality of results, and that our current monitoring and evaluation system faces a number of technical challenges.

D2. Progress and Plans to Address Challenge: WfWI has begun to strengthen our approach to M&E and the systems that underpin it. These have included:

- Building experienced M&E teams globally through appropriate staffing, and enabling learning and training opportunities, including across teams.
- Investing in an Electronic Data Collection system for more effective, consistent and streamlined data collection.
- Focusing on a systematic review of our core indicators and related questions used to measure them (including self-reported personal earnings and knowledge levels) based on the work we

have done to clarify WfWI's vision and ToC, enabling us to more robustly gauge the effect of our programmes and set more realistic targets.

To this end, we have received feedback from each country office, including Afghanistan, on a draft question bank that compiles survey questions from various sources in each of the thematic outcome areas of our work, and includes some of the scales used by TP in their own survey instrument (to capture self-efficacy, self-esteem, gender norms and gender-based violence). Some of the feedback highlights the complexity of administering more detailed and nuanced questions, which would require intensive training and more time to administer well. They also articulate the difficulty of incorporating them into routine surveys that must be accommodated/ conducted within fairly strict operational constraints.

WfWI is revising the set of indicators and accompanying survey questions based on this feedback. After pilot testing the new instrument, we will revise the electronic survey forms to reflect the new questionnaires and then test the compatibility of the new variables with the existing structure of the backend database, prior to final revisions and then systematic rollout across country offices. We expect to complete this critical exercise in the next year.

- Changes to the language used internally and externally to present our outcome indicators to highlight the sample from which the specific results were drawn; and the limitations of pre- and post-training data collection, including the inability to make causal inferences.
- To improve the measurement of knowledge and attitudes among men trained through our MEP, an ongoing collaboration with the American Institutes for Research in Nigeria has produced a revised survey instrument in May 2015 that draws on current best practice in measuring gender norms internationally (including scales such as the Gender Equitable Men (GEM) scale that is a tested index to measure gender attitudes). We have begun the process of drawing from the design of this instrument and adapting it for the Afghanistan training approach and context.
- Administering surveys on gender norms in a recurring operational environment is more complex than a one-off survey for a study. We have initiated discussions with the International Center for Research on Women who have in-house experts on men and masculinities research, to guide us on both adaptation of international best practice to local contexts and to advise on training tools for our enumerators to administer these more complex tools with appropriate research ethics and sensitivity, so as to prevent any backlash.
- While WfWI is involved in various monitoring, research and evaluation projects and partnerships to help us strengthen our programme and our measurement, we believe that the most effective way to assess WfWI's impact would be through a rigorous impact evaluation that builds a valid counterfactual using randomised assignment of the programme at the outset. This will allow us to attribute observed changes in women to our programme, and thereby enable WfWI to draw causal inferences. We are currently seeking the funds for such an evaluation.

E. Prioritising and expanding coordination with external actors

E1. Emerging Challenge: WfWI is aware that it needs to do much more in collaborating and reaching out to external actors, to share lessons learned; invest in building partnerships to improve outcomes for programme participants; and for influencing.

E2. Progress and Plans to Address Challenge: WfWI's efforts to build meaningful partnerships with organisations such as Harakat and Zardozi are mirrored in a global effort to improve programme outcomes for women through partners.

- In DRC, WfWI selected four local partners, who had expertise in advocacy, to partner with us on a research and advocacy project regarding women's access to land. Following their contribution to a participatory research project led by WfWI and funded through DFID, the

partner organisations have come together to develop a joint advocacy plan to act on the research findings.

- WfWI is also implementing a three-year programme (2013-2016) to support 40,000 women in Rwanda through a partnership with Sustainable Harvest, a for-profit coffee exporter which invests in small-scale farmers and links them to the international marketplace. Funded through an investment by Bloomberg Philanthropies, the partnership provides core programme participants with the option to build vocational skills and income through coffee farming and cooperative development.

WfWI's global efforts in this area represent real opportunities to improve outcomes for women and share learning across programme countries on partnerships with organisations providing complementary services.

In addition, WfWI has also begun to invest in raising the voices of the women we serve to the global stage over the last two years, so that their experiences are reflected in the policy and programming of other international actors.

- In December 2014, through GAPS, WfWI-UK fed into network efforts around the London Development Conference for Afghanistan, advocating for greater representation of women. This included a policy briefing and a drop-in session for parliamentarians where they could do a photo-action and show support for Afghan women. At the event, WfWI spoke to International Development Secretary Justine Greening MP and other engaged parliamentarians.
- WfWI also facilitated the participation of the Afghanistan team and the Afghan Women's Network in the UK National Action Plan consultation, building their capacities to participate in local policy-related issues and sharing their findings with UK decision makers and other stakeholders.

Our new country director has identified this as an area in which we are determined to improve, and on recent visit made contacts with bilaterals (British ambassador and the Canadian political advisor to the ambassador), the advisors to the First Lady, Manager of Promote (USAID) and with the Open Society Foundation. The Afghanistan Public Policy and Research Organisation (APPRO) and Canadian Women for Afghan Women have also been added to our list of partners. In addition, we have recently filled a global position to strengthen our security structures, and our new Assistant Director of Security has reached out to a number of CSOs as part of her security assessment of Afghanistan, resulting in improved coordination and stronger relationships with other local organisations.

IV. OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

This section covers other considerations on the report with particular emphasis on the methodology.

A. Learning and limitations of TP's methodology:

WfWI is happy to learn from TP's work as a diagnostic cross-sectional survey of a simple random sample drawn from the pool of women graduates in Afghanistan, which is similar to the design of a study we are conducting in Rwanda at present with a consultant. We believe, however, that while it is a useful tool for learning, it is not a rigorous assessment of project impact as it does not include a valid counterfactual. WfWI has begun to use appropriate language and caveats in presenting our own monitoring data as our current studies and tools have this limitation as well, and urge TP to establish a similar nuanced approach in how these findings are presented.

Further, the methods used for data collection from participants in the MEP is also limited – a sample of 24 out of 450 MEP participants were interviewed and also engaged in focus group discussions. It is our understanding that in order to present data that reflects representative views of the trained population with standard levels of confidence, it would have to be based on a sample of around 200 men. We would thus encourage TP to present these findings as insights from a qualitative exercise conducted with a small sample of MEP graduates.

Finally, as noted previously, we are in the process of revising our core survey instrument and welcome the references to the various scales used in the TP survey instrument. The same construct or outcome can be measured in numerous ways, which makes a comparison of outcomes as measured by the TP study interesting and important. However, given that WfWI's targets were based on our own M&E instruments, we believe that direct comparisons with completely different measures of the same outcomes do not provide meaningful guidance on project achievements.

B. Inaccuracies in Numbers of Women Served

The report states that the programme fell short by nearly 4,000 participants over the three years. However, the WfWI database shows that it supported 14,836 women across five districts through HDF funds, putting the shortfall at 764 women⁴. We believe that TP received an incomplete participant list from the country office due to a misunderstanding on the part of our country office, which has then led to an incomplete understanding on how WfWI counts and reports on participants in each grant year, as we enrol women on a rolling basis. Though this was clarified to TP during the course of the evaluation, it is not reflected in their conclusions.

V. CONCLUSION

This document has sought to clarify WfWI's rationale and approach as well as highlight the areas that the organisation has prioritised for urgent and strategic action. As a learning organisation, we are committed to using both the positive and critical findings of the TP evaluation, alongside our three other independent evaluations, to strengthen our approach and improve outcomes for the marginalised women we serve in Afghanistan. We would like to thank TP for their recommendations and HDF for supporting our work and this evaluation, and to reiterate our commitment to dialogue and further clarifications around our programme and this response with TP and HDF, as required.

⁴ WfWI would like to note that we had communicated with HDF that the Afghanistan programme would serve 500 less women in the second year of the grant due to organisation-wide reductions in our sponsorship programme.