



How do labour programmes contribute to social inclusion in Afghanistan?

Evidence from BRAC's life skills education and livelihoods trainings for young women

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Abstract

This study adopts a social exclusion lens to analyse the effects of BRAC's life skills education and livelihoods trainings for young women in Afghanistan and tests assumptions about the role labour programmes can play in contributing to social inclusion. It used mixed methods and employed a quasi-experimental impact evaluation. The findings show that the trainings had only small effects on some indicators of social inclusion related to knowledge and skills acquisition but almost no impact in terms of employment and business activity. A key factor contributing to the limited income-generating outcomes of the livelihoods training related to its design and delivery. More generally, the research revealed that education, access to financial capital and restrictions on female mobility were the key barriers to female employment.



Preface

This report is part of a wider research project that assessed the effectiveness and relevance of social protection and labour programmes in promoting social inclusion in South Asia. The research was undertaken in collaboration with partner organisations in four countries, examining BRAC's life skills education and livelihoods trainings for young women in Afghanistan, the Chars Livelihoods Programme and the Vulnerable Group Development Programme in Bangladesh, India's National Health Insurance Programme (RSBY) in Maharashtra and Uttar Pradesh and the Child Grant in the Karnali region of Nepal. Reports and briefings for each country and a paper providing cross-country analysis and drawing out lessons of relevance for regional and international policy can be found at: www.odi.org/sp-inclusion.

International policy paper, briefing and background note

- Babajanian, B., Hagen-Zanker, J., and Holmes, R. (2014) How do social protection and labour programmes contribute to social inclusion? Evidence from Afghanistan, Bangladesh, India and Nepal. ODI Report.
- Babajanian, B., Hagen-Zanker, J., and Holmes, R. (2014) Can social protection and labour programmes contribute to social inclusion? Evidence from Afghanistan, Bangladesh, India and Nepal. ODI Briefing No.85.
- Babajanian, B., and Hagen-Zanker, J. (2012) Social protection and social exclusion: an analytical framework to assess the links. ODI Background Note.

Country reports

- Adhikari, T.P., Thapa, F.B., Tamrakar, S., Magar, P.B., Hagen-Zanker, J., and Babajanian, B. (2014) How does social protection contribute to social inclusion in Nepal? Evidence from the Child Grant in the Karnali Region. ODI Report.
- Echavez, C., Babajanian, B., Hagen-Zanker, J., Akter, S., and Bagaporo, J.L. (2014) How do labour programmes contribute to social inclusion in Afghanistan? Evidence from BRAC's life skills education and livelihoods trainings for young women. ODI Report.
- Sabharwal, N.S., Mishra, V.K., Naik, A.K., Holmes, R., and Hagen-Zanker, J. (2014) How does social protection contribute to social inclusion in India? Evidence from the National Health Insurance Programme (RSBY) in Maharashtra and Uttar Pradesh. ODI Report.
- Siddiki, O.F., Holmes, R., Jahan, F., Chowdhury, F.S., and Hagen-Zanker, J. (2014) How do safety nets contribute to social inclusion in Bangladesh? Evidence from the Chars Livelihoods Programme and the Vulnerable Group Development programme. ODI Report.

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- Adhikari, T.P., Hagen-Zanker, J., and Babajanian, B. (2014) The contribution of Nepal's Child Grant to social inclusion in the Karnali region. Country briefing. ODI, London.
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- Siddiki, O.F., Holmes, R., Jahan, F., Chowdhury, F.S., and Hagen-Zanker, J. (2014) The contribution of the Chars Livelihoods Programme and the Vulnerable Group Development programme to social inclusion in Bangladesh. Country Briefing. ODI, London.

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Abbreviations

ARC	Adolescent Reading Centre
AIHRC	Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission
ANDS	Afghanistan National Development Strategy
AREU	Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit
ATT	Average Effect of Treatment on the Treated
AWN	Afghan Women's Network
BRAC	Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee
CBS	Community-based School
CDC	Community Development Council
CIA	Conditional Independence Assumption
CIDA	Canadian International Development Agency
CQ	Community Questionnaire
CSO	Central Statistics Organisation
DFAT	Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade
EU	European Union
FDG	Focus Group Discussion
GEP	Girls' Education Project
GII	Gender Inequality Index
HRW	Human Rights Watch
ICRW	International Centre for Research on Women
ICG	International Crisis Group
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
IDI	In-depth Interview
IFC	International Finance Corporation
ILO	International Labour Organization
IRA	Islamic Republic of Afghanistan
KII	Key Informant Interview
LSE	London School of Economics
MDG	Millennium Development Goal
MoE	Ministry of Education
MoLSAMD	Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs, Martyrs and the Disabled
MRRD	Ministry of Rehabilitation and Rural Development
NGO	Non-governmental Organisation
NPP	National Priority Programme
NSDP	National Skills Development Programme
NSP	National Solidarity Plan
ODI	Overseas Development Institute
PSM	Propensity Score Matching
QEPS	Quality Enhancement of Public Schools
RNI	Research and New Initiatives
TAS	The Asia Foundation
TVET	Technical Vocational Education and Training
UN	United Nations
UNDP	UN Development Programme
UNICEF	UN International Children's Fund
VAW	Violence Against Women
WFP	World Food Programme

Executive summary

This project examined the impacts of BRAC's life skills education training and livelihoods training in Kabul and Parwan provinces in Afghanistan. BRAC implemented the training as part of its Girls' Education Project (GEP) between 2007 and 2011, with financial support from the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA). The project established adolescent reading centres (ARCs) for females aged 15-20 years and who had primary-level education but could not continue with their education. ARCs sought to provide adolescent girls with a safe space to socialise and remain engaged in the learning process even after they had stopped attending school. The ARC programme ran in Kabul communities from March to June 2011 and in Parwan from June to August 2011.

ARC participants had the opportunity to receive two types of training, on life skills and on livelihoods. The life skills education training was a five-day course discussing general and reproductive health and children's and women's rights. The livelihoods training was taught for three months and offered skills intended to allow the participants to undertake income-generating activities and become economically reliant.

The research set out to establish the extent to which provision of life skills education training and livelihoods training to young women enabled them to engage in the labour market and earn an income. It also examined whether the intervention generated other effects, more specifically if it promoted empowerment as well as affecting social relations and interaction with authorities. The objective was to assess not only the effects of BRAC's intervention but also its effectiveness in promoting 'transformative' outcomes. Guided by the social exclusion framework, the research hoped to understand whether the livelihoods training in particular was able to challenge the societal structures and processes that limited women's access to the labour market.

The study utilised a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods. The quantitative method used descriptive and propensity score matching (PSM) analyses to consider a range of outcomes by comparing relevance for beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries. In total, 364 respondents (each from a different household), with an even split between beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries, were interviewed in 13 villages. The qualitative approach involved 26 focus group discussions (FGDs) with 76 beneficiaries and 75 non-beneficiaries; and semi-structured in-depth interviews (IDIs) with 21 beneficiaries and 14 non-beneficiaries.

Overall, the majority of the beneficiaries found the life skills education training useful. Its contribution to girls' knowledge on health, literacy skills and rights awareness appears to be among the key perceived benefits. The survey and qualitative data suggest a considerable share of beneficiaries have utilised their new knowledge of health, for example by seeing a doctor to address a health concern or improving personal/household hygiene practices. Qualitative evidence indicates that girls have used their literacy skills to help children in the household with homework.

The livelihoods training offered a variety of modules, included embroidery, bag making, tailoring, livestock raising and food processing. Tailoring was the most popular course, with 150 subscribers among our beneficiary respondents (of a total of 182). More than half of beneficiaries reported obtaining new skills and a fifth said they had improved existing skills. Almost two-thirds of survey respondents said they were able to apply the knowledge gained from the training. The most widespread application was the use of new skills for making clothes for personal use and for other family members.

A third of beneficiaries felt they did not gain much from the livelihoods training. Respondents of the qualitative assessment suggested the training did not enable them to acquire sufficient tailoring skills in order to make clothes for money. Only a small share of all beneficiaries (13%, or 23 of 182) reported being able to utilise their skills in starting a business. Qualitative interviews confirmed that some 19 participants of the livelihoods training were able to engage in business and earn income. The results of the PSM analysis suggest that, while the livelihoods training appears to have had a small positive impact on the likelihood of working and on household income, this is very small and did not demonstrate substantial difference in practice.

A key factor contributing to the limited income-generating outcomes of the livelihoods training related to its design and delivery. Respondents who did not engage in a tailoring business considered insufficient skills the primary reason for not being able to undertake income-generating activities after the training. Those who were engaged in business appeared to have a basic level of knowledge of tailoring before the course was introduced. The training enabled them to strengthen their skills and to become more proficient. Those who started the course without prior knowledge were not able to learn sufficient skills to make clothes for money. Beneficiary perceptions generated by the quantitative survey attest to the fact that the livelihoods training was not effective in fostering adequate skills. Some 43% of survey beneficiary respondents referred to lack of skills as one of the key reasons for not engaging in business in the previous 12 months. Given its home-based nature, the outcomes of the training were not affected by major constraints to female employment such as restricted mobility.

In terms of empowerment effects, nearly a third of beneficiaries of both trainings reported being able to influence household income, and a significantly higher proportion of beneficiaries were able to fully influence such spending compared with non-beneficiary respondents. Analysis of the data, however, does not allow for establishing a causal link between greater decision-making authority over household income and the livelihoods training. The majority of respondents who earned an income were able to influence decisions on how their personal income was spent, but the variation between beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries is not significant.

The life skills education training and the livelihoods training had a mostly positive effect on social relations, including relations with family and community members. They contributed to greater respect and appreciation by other family and community members and increased the social networks and social interaction of beneficiaries. At the same time, some respondents reported increased tension and a negative attitude in their community. In some cases, this was thought to be driven by jealousy among girls ineligible to enrol on the course, and in others by conservative attitudes of community members, who disapproved of the course content. Participation in the trainings did not promote interaction with authorities: women in the study areas had no interaction with local authorities.

Barriers to women's employment may be different depending on a specific sector and occupation. While this study sought to assess factors that affected the outcomes of BRAC's interventions in the specific areas of its focus, it also solicited evidence on general constraints and opportunities to female employment. Perceptions of young women about constraints to female employment more generally revealed that, besides knowledge and skills, ability to set up a business depends on a range of factors. Respondents indicated that education, access to financial capital and productive resources and restrictions on female mobility were the key barriers to female employment. While most of these factors present constraints to both men and women, they appear to be more limiting for women.

In order to promote access to jobs and income for women, policy interventions must not only deliver effective teaching and learning outcomes, but also tackle social, economic and institutional factors that result in unequal access and multiple deprivations. This involves identifying and recognising drivers of exclusion that affect women's ability to take advantage of economic opportunities in specific sectors or occupations. Some of these drivers can be addressed through design and institutional arrangements of labour market interventions; others require long-term commitment and broader policy engagement.

1 Research objectives and contribution

This mixed method study funded by the European Union (EU) and the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) examines the impact of life skills education training and livelihoods training offered by adolescent reading centres (ARCs) established by the Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee (BRAC) in Afghanistan. The research examined life skills education training and livelihoods training carried out in Kabul and Parwan provinces in 2011.

The BRAC initiative targeted adolescent females who are excluded from formal schools. Young females are considered especially disadvantaged in terms of education and literacy and labour market participation. The BRAC intervention seeks to promote their inclusion by offering them an opportunity to acquire knowledge and skills and undertake income-generating activities. It offered two types of training: life skills education training and livelihoods training. Life skills education training is a five-day course that discusses general and reproductive health and children's and women's rights. The livelihoods training offers skills to allow participants to become economically self-reliant. The latter course lasts three months and skills include embroidery, bag making, tailoring, livestock raising and food processing.

The research set out to establish the extent to which provision of training to young women (aged 15-20 years) enabled them to engage in the labour market and earn an income. It also examined whether the intervention generated other effects, and, more specifically, whether it promoted empowerment or affected social relations and interaction with authorities. The objective was to assess not only the effects of BRAC's intervention but also its effectiveness in promoting 'transformative' outcomes. Guided by the social exclusion framework, the research hoped to understand whether the livelihoods training in particular was able to challenge the societal structures and processes that limited women's access to the labour market.

Years of war, insecurity and instability in Afghanistan have left the country with minimum infrastructure and serious economic, social and political challenges. These years of instability, along with internal displacement and exile, have altered many aspects of Afghans' lives. Women and men, the young and the old, those of different ethnic groups and regions, all experience and navigate these challenges and exclusions in distinctive ways. Women have had to endure particular hardship as a result of increased violence, denial of their rights and lack of opportunities (Moradian, 2013), and they experience intersecting exclusions.

The overall economic and institutional environment in the country restricts economic and income-earning opportunities for both men and women, but women experience especially significant challenges: serious inequalities remain. The literature review identified inadequate education and skills, poor access to capital and markets and limited physical security and mobility as some of the key barriers to female employment in Afghanistan. Gender is a key factor determining access to resources, services and opportunities and thus mediates access to employment.

This mixed method study is part of a three-year multi-country research project assessing the effectiveness of social protection and labour market initiatives in improving the lives and livelihoods of socially excluded

individuals Asia. Other case studies look at the impacts of the Rashtriya Swasthya Bima Yojana health insurance scheme in India; the Child Protection Grant in Nepal; and the Vulnerable Group Development Programme and the Chars Livelihood Programme in Bangladesh. The case studies focus on different policy interventions and thus contribute to our understanding of the strengths and limitations of different institutional models in addressing human vulnerabilities.

The BRAC training programme and similar skills training schemes are ‘active’ programmes that seek to promote inclusion in the labour market. Active labour market programmes cover a wide range of interventions, including wage subsidies, public works, job search assistance, counselling and skills training. ‘Passive’ measures, on the other hand, include unemployment insurance or social assistance for the unemployed.¹ Active labour market instruments are often used as complementary (‘activation’) measures to support disadvantaged individuals who receive social assistance to enter or re-enter the labour market and facilitate ‘graduation’ from social assistance to work.

Skills training programmes include a variety of programmes, including basic literacy and numeracy, job-related vocational training and second-chance and equivalency programmes (Betcherman et al., 2007). These interventions are designed to develop skills, knowledge and awareness and help enhance capacity to work and generate an income.

Box 1: Active labour market programmes

Active labour market interventions are an important part of the strategies of many governments and international organisations. For example, the World Bank’s 2012-2022 Social Protection and Labor Strategy (World Bank, 2012) calls for the targeting of youth transitioning from school to work through various programmes, including training, counselling, job search assistance, intermediation services, skills certification and wage subsidies. The strategy emphasises the importance of supporting self-employed individuals, who constitute the majority of workers in many low-income countries.

The UN Children’s Fund (UNICEF) Social Protection Strategy for Eastern and Southern Africa (UNICEF, 2008) proposes the need to strengthen the second-chance education, training and life skills of adolescents. It maintains that such programmes invest in the human capital – including good health, education and life skills – that is required to enhance individuals’ productive capacity and their transition to employment and self-employment.

Mechanisms to promote participation in the labour market are seen as tools for long-term empowerment and social inclusion.² There is increasing recognition of the need for social protection and labour policies and programmes to contribute to transformative objectives. In order to generate sustainable change, development interventions must contribute to long-term wellbeing and broader societal goals of equity, social justice and empowerment. Echoing this thinking from the feminist perspective, Reid et al. (2012) suggest a reframing of social protection away from the question, ‘What do women and children need to protect them from adversity?’

¹ <http://go.worldbank.org/MVGT0420A0>

² http://europa.eu/legislation_summaries/employment_and_social_policy/social_inclusion_fight_against_poverty/em0009_en.htm

to, ‘What would make our lives easier, safer and more free, and what would make us more valued, productive, have more life opportunities, have more power?’³

The role of social protection and labour interventions in achieving transformative goals has not been adequately documented. A comprehensive review by Betcherman et al. (2004) suggests the available evidence is limited and hampers our understanding of what works in the area of labour market policies, especially outside the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) area. In order to establish the transformative impact of these interventions, it is important to understand whether and under what circumstances they can challenge the societal structures and processes that generate poverty and vulnerability in the formal and informal domains.

This study uses the social exclusion framework to evaluate and analyse the impacts of BRAC’s interventions. This lens enables us not only to assess its impacts on various dimensions of wellbeing but also to pay attention to specific drivers of poverty and vulnerability. In relation to labour market programmes, it is important to acknowledge that barriers to women’s employment may be different depending on the specific sector and occupation. While this study sought to assess the factors affecting the outcomes of BRAC’s interventions in its focus areas, it also solicited evidence on general constraints to and opportunities for female employment.

The findings of this study will contribute to knowledge about the effectiveness of labour market interventions in promoting women’s empowerment and wellbeing in Afghanistan. It is especially valuable considering the limited evidence base on this subject. In the case of Afghanistan (although this is also true globally), gender-disaggregated data, while increasing, remain limited, especially in relation to work, time use and income generation (Ganesh et al., 2013). It is therefore difficult to assess impact, reach or coverage, let alone programmes’ ‘transformative power and contribution to human dignity’ (Köhler et al., 2009: 15). Given the ongoing debate about how to measure female empowerment in all its complexity and multidimensionality (ICRW, 2011), there are challenges in measuring impact in terms of income generation or in terms of wellbeing more broadly.

The report is structured as follows. Section 2 reviews the literature to set out the broader contextual issues and highlight lessons from existing skills training interventions for women in Afghanistan. Sections 3, 4, 5 and 6 review analytical framework, the research questions, methodology and ethical considerations. Discussion of the findings covers perceptions of usefulness and practical application of the life skills education training and the livelihoods training (Sections 9 and 10), analysis of the impact of the livelihoods training on employment generation based on propensity score matching (PSM) results (Section 11), assessment of the key barriers to women’s economic activity (Section 12), analysis of the livelihoods training’s effects on female empowerment (Section 13) and social relations and interaction with authorities (Section 14). Sections 15 and 16 synthesise and discuss the findings and draw recommendations for policy and practice.

³ <http://www.forum.awid.org/forum12/2013/04/embracing-disruptions-responding-to-uncertainties-valuing-agency-situating-a-feminist-approach-to-social-protection/>

2 Gender relations, young women and economic empowerment in Afghanistan

This section reviews the literature on gender relations, young women and economic empowerment in Afghanistan. In particular, it examines recent data and research on gender relations, as well as on initiatives to promote women's literacy, vocational education, training and economic empowerment. The literature surveyed ranges from impact assessments and materials from international organisations and donors to academic studies on gender and the economy. We also reviewed promising practices identified in the broader literature around gender, development, economic empowerment and social protection.

2.1 Gender, employment and barriers to economic empowerment

The process of women's economic empowerment is contingent on a number of different interrelated spheres, and is not confined to the economic domain. Kabeer et al. (2011) argue that 'economic pathways of women's empowerment [...] are essentially multidimensional processes of change encompassing different spheres of women's lives' (p.1), going beyond the merely economic and varying greatly by context, just as gender relations do. Kabeer (2008) posits that 'the pathways through which change takes place in a society, and the forms of change that women themselves will prioritise, will be shaped in important ways by the nature of the constraints that prevail in a particular society' (p.1).

Our literature review identified inadequate education and skills, limited access to capital and markets and restrictions on freedom of mobility and physical security as some of the key barriers to female employment in Afghanistan. Furthermore, women have limited access to political and decision-making structures and justice systems. This limits their ability to convey their voice, express their preferences and influence important decisions that affect their lives, including on economic activities and occupational choices.

Gender is a key factor affecting access to resources, services and opportunities and thus mediating access to employment. Gender relations in Afghanistan (Azarbaijani-Moghaddam, 2010; Kabeer et al., 2011; Petesch, 2013) have been characterised as being of highly unequal interdependence. Women are more disadvantaged than men in terms of their ability to receive skills and education, access productive resources and assets and work outside their homes.

Under the Taliban government, women in Afghanistan were denied basic rights such as access to health and education. Many were also denied the right to work, except in the health sector, and were confined to home (ICG, 2013). Since the ousting of the Taliban government in 2001, women's rights have become an important domestic policy area and have received international attention. Bilateral and multilateral institutions and international and national non-governmental organisations (NGOs) have supported initiatives for Afghan women through aid flows and by influencing national policymaking procedures and supporting women's equal rights in the Constitution, as well as women's access to public spaces and education and their active and meaningful participation in politics (Moradian, 2013). Such efforts have had positive results such as an increase

in the number of girls in primary education and more political participation of women. However, this formal progress has not always translated into real changes in the lives of ordinary women. Stark inequalities remain, and women are significantly worse off than men in terms of their social and economic wellbeing.

The 2013 global Gender Inequality Index (GII) examines women’s reproductive health, empowerment and labour market participation relative to men’s. Afghanistan ranked 147 out of 186 countries, with a score of 0.712, where 0 represented complete equality and 1 complete inequality, compared with a world average of 0.463 or 46.3% (UNDP, 2013).⁴ Further data on gender inequalities and challenges for women in Afghanistan are explored in The Asia Foundation (TAF) annual Survey of the Afghan People, which in 2013⁵ found that Afghans identified the biggest problems facing women as education and illiteracy (27%), a lack of job opportunities for women (12%), women’s rights (10%), forced marriages and dowry payments (9%) and domestic violence (8%). Both men and women reported many of these issues with equal frequency, although women ranked job opportunities more frequently than men did, and those in rural areas cited women’s rights more frequently compared with those in urban areas (TAF, 2013).

2.2 Employment and economic opportunities

Women’s share of wage employment in the non-agriculture sector is only 8% – significantly below the average for South Asia, which is already the region with the lowest share globally of employment for women (IRA, 2010). According to the International Labour Organization (ILO), the female (above age 15) labour force participation rate in 2011 (the latest date for which information was available) was 16% compared with 77% for men.⁶ This was worse only than that of Syria (13%); Algeria, Iraq, Jordan and West Bank and Gaza reported similar participation rates. However, data on formal labour force participation do not help account for the realities of women’s informal and unpaid work (Gaye et al., 2010), nor women’s underemployment (Ganesh et al., 2013).

For women who are employed, a 2008 International Finance Corporation (IFC) and World Bank study found that women’s participation in enterprise in Afghanistan was significantly lower across indicators, compared with the South Asia region and global averages (Table 1).

Table 1: Women’s participation in enterprise

Indicator	Afghanistan	South Asia	All countries
Firms with female participation in ownership (%)	2.8	17.5	36.6
Firms with a female top manager (%)	0.8	7.0	18.4
Permanent full-time workers who are female (%)	3.3	13.3	31.6
Permanent full-time non-production workers who are female (%)	0.5	1.8	10.1

While comprehensive economic data disaggregated by gender are not available for Afghanistan (Ganesh et al., 2013), those indicators that are available reveal a stark picture. In a study mapping women’s economic activity, Ganesh et al. argue that women not only are limited in their ability to receive an education but also have restricted access to capital and markets. They summarise the main barriers thus:

⁴ See <http://hdr.undp.org/en/content/how-gii-calculated-and-what-are-its-main-findings-terms-national-and-regional-patterns>

⁵ This has taken place over the past nine years, and in 2013 surveyed 9,260 respondents from all 34 provinces.

⁶ <http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SL.TLF.CACT.FE.ZS>

Women who have the least access to education, training, work experience or marketable skills and to mobility, capital, credit or business acumen will face an uphill struggle in capturing and retaining footholds in the unfolding economy. Women are further ring-fenced by their reproductive and caring roles in terms of time availability, especially given the high reproductive rates and limited access to health and care facilities. Other socio-cultural norms ensure that access to the public sphere of markets is necessarily mediated by males [...] Access, especially direct access, to economic betterment is thus blocked in many ways for women in a cash economy whose locus is the market/public sphere; their entry into it is all but 'forbidden' (p.38).

Echavez (2012) echoes this depiction in qualitative research on gender and economic choice led by the Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit (AREU). According to participants in this survey, engaging in business is men's prerogative; women face major barriers if they attempt to run businesses on their own, without their husband's involvement. They suggested men have more decision-making authority, are more mobile and thus have greater access to information and opportunities. They also suggested, 'It is not culturally acceptable for a woman to open a business on her own' (p.35). The study also highlights that women lack access to capital and no government or NGO support to facilitate their access to low-interest loans exists. The study maintains that, 'Wives succeeding in business were ultimately seen as a rare and even peculiar scenario across all study communities' (p.36).

In addition to low overall numbers of women involved in paid work, businesswomen also face difficulties registering their businesses, accessing loans and participating in public life, where many informal business negotiations and networking take place. At the same time, poor market infrastructure and transport mean women struggle to access new buyers, training and technology, as well as market information useful to develop and improve their products (Ritchie, 2013).

Women participate significantly more strongly in the agriculture sector in Afghanistan, in both paid and unpaid capacities. A 2011 World Bank study found women were concentrated mainly in harvesting and post-harvest processing tasks that required hard and tedious physical labour. However, women's work is mainly unremunerated and performed alongside other unpaid daily household chores. Women's work generally includes preparing the soil, seeds and seedbeds, weeding and cleaning, as well as working on the wheat post-harvest. Women who farm face poor access to agricultural inputs such as land, seeds, tools, credit, aid and extension services, as well as experiencing insecure control over agricultural outputs and income, high disparities in daily agricultural wages (when paid at all) and difficulties accessing markets in which to sell goods (Ganesh et al., 2013).

2.3 Education

According to Afghanistan's 2010 report on progress on the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), a typical woman receives only four years of education, if she is able to access education at all (IRA, 2010). Access to education has a close relationship with job opportunities and consequently with women's economic empowerment. In particular, women's economic prospects are hindered by a low literacy rate, one of the lowest among developing countries. The 2008 estimated national adult literacy rate (15 and above age-group) is 18% for women and 50% for men (MoE 2012). In rural areas where more than 70 per cent of the population resides, an estimated 90 per cent of women and 63 percent of men are illiterate. This gender disparity in literacy is linked to unequal educational opportunities and attainment, leaving women ill equipped to participate in the labour market and capitalise on economic opportunities.

Until recently, only 6% of women aged 25 and over had any access to formal education (compared with 25% for men of the same age). According to the 2013 Survey of the Afghan People (TAF, 2013), lack of education is more

common for rural than for urban respondents, and Uzbek and Pashtun women are less likely to have education than other ethnic groups, such as Hazara women, who are most likely to have had formal education at any level.

Younger women are more likely to have been educated than older women (TAF, 2013). From 2002 to 2010, overall school enrolment increased from 1 to 7 million, 37% of whom are girls. The ratio of girls to boys in primary school has increased by 7%, from 0.6% in 2003 to 66% in 2010 (IRA, 2010). Educational enrolment for girls has been increasing, except for in tertiary education, which went from 21% in 2005 to 23% in 2008 and back to 21% in 2009 (ibid.). Only 2% of TAF respondents in 2013 reported university education; of those who did, a mere 12% were women (TAF, 2013).

Women's security concerns have a significant impact on school attendance, and many girls also do not attend school because of household work (AIHRC, 2006). According to the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC), the main ongoing challenges for girls in attending school are gender discrimination, poverty, security challenges and lack of schools that take girls (ibid.).

2.4 Mobility, safety and women's human rights

Mobility and physical security are vital factors in accessing education and economic opportunities. Existing social norms in Afghanistan limit women's position to the domestic sphere, while advancing men's role of primary breadwinners. They restrict women's free movement and ability to take part in employment outside home. Women are often the first targets for threats and violence in times of conflict and insurgency (HRW, 2010), which, alongside existing gender norms and practices, constrain women's mobility, with impacts on their access to education, health care and employment. Lack of mobility and security also disproportionately affects women's access to economic enterprise and has a negative impact on their ability to move up to higher value chain activities (Ritchie, 2013).

Evidence suggests restrictions on female mobility are not universal, which means there may be space for empowerment. TAF's nationwide survey of 34 provinces of Afghanistan, covering a sample of 6,300 people, provides an interesting account of people's views of the problems facing women: 80% of female and 55% of male respondents said they thought women should be able to work outside the home (TAF, 2013).

An Afghan Women's Network (AWN) report on gender-based violence in 2009 highlighted a 100% increase in reported cases of violence against women (VAW) from 2008 to 2009. The cases reported ranged from domestic violence to honour killing and rape. According to the report, 80% of women are forced into marriage without their consent. In a survey by Global Rights Afghanistan (2008), covering women from 4,700 households across 16 provinces, 87.2% of women had experienced at least one kind of violence – physical, emotional or sexual – during their lifetime. A total of 62% reported experiencing multiple categories of violence. Law enforcement agencies often arrest women who escape violence at home, rather than attempting to pursue and prosecute cases of gender-based violence (ICG, 2013).

2.5 Political participation, decision making and access to justice

In the past decade, women's participation in politics has increased, and this has consistently been held up as a major achievement for women's rights since the fall of the Taliban. The Afghanistan Constitution mandates that women make up 25% of all elected officials; 27% of elected officials in 2009-2010 were female (IRA, 2010). A total of 44% of Afghans in 2013 supported equal representation of women and men in elected government positions, although there has been a small but noticeable decline in support for equality in leadership positions, from 50% to 51% in the 2006-2008 period (TAF, 2013).

In 2013, however, women's quota provisions in the new elections law were systematically taken out. A 20% quota for women in provincial council seats was negotiated back into the law in July 2013, but a 5% reduction (down from a previous quota of 25%) eliminated 21 women's seats in said councils. Low numbers of female candidates may contribute towards further curbing women's quotas and female voter turnout. There are few women occupying ranking civil service positions or positions at provincial or district levels (IRA, 2010).

Women are also restricted in their ability to take part in public forums and decision making at the community level. A study by Azarbaijani-Moghaddam (2010) examined women's participation in community development councils (CDCs), established under the National Solidarity Plan (NSP) to encourage community decision making and promote equal representation of women in the process. Gender segregation in different aspects of society was high: for instance, while women were allowed to take part in CDCs, they were less likely to be able to contribute meaningfully to decision making. The study concluded that women's participation was limited heavily by male attitudes towards women's participation. It suggested special trainings and leadership skills to improve women's confidence, as well as trainings for women to make them more employable.

In terms of access to justice, application of legal standards across the country remains weak (ICG, 2013). Only a small fraction of incidents against women are reported and investigated. Women have little confidence in the police, who are reportedly responsible for around 15% of VAW (ibid.). The formal justice system has a residual role in maintaining law and order: communities (and even formal justice officials) refer cases involving women to local assemblies (*jirga* or *shura*) for dispute settlement and arbitration. These informal bodies tend to be dominated by men and to use traditional interpretations of Sharia and tribal customs. Male representation is crucial in addressing women's grievances, and loss of a male mediator may leave women without recourse (Kandiyoti, 2007). Only 21% of women reported knowing where they could take their problems to be resolved, with the Directorate of Women's Affairs, the Human Rights Council and the district government office being the most commonly cited institutions (TAF, 2013).

2.6 Skills training

Over the past decade, the Afghan government and the international community have identified job creation for young people and youth empowerment as paramount issues that must be addressed if Afghanistan is to move towards stability (see also UNESCO, 2011, in Lavender, 2011). The Afghanistan National Development Strategy (ANDS) 2008-2013 and national priority programmes (NPPs) support improvements in priority areas, such as human resource development, private sector development, peace, governance and others.⁷ The ANDS is particularly focused on 'at-risk' populations (including female-headed households) and war survivors, and programmes aim for 35% female participation (IRA, 2007).

The ANDS outlines the need for a National Vocational Education and Training Board within the Afghanistan National Qualification Framework and under the Afghanistan National Qualification Authority. Given high unemployment, the ANDS characterises skills development as a set of 'high priority public arrangements in the social support system' (IRA, 2007: 126). Public works programmes, such as the NSP, address elements of socioeconomic insecurity and social exclusion.

The National Skills Development Programme (NSDP) was set up in 2004 by the Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs, Martyrs and the Disabled (MoLSAMD). Its main focus is to build a national technical vocational education and training (TVET) system to accommodate the demands of the labour market and provide knowledge and skills to support decent work, as outlined in the ANDS. The NSDP has set national standards for TVET and seeks to strengthen systems for training rather just delivering it (Solotaroff et al., 2009), and has been

⁷ <http://mof.gov.af/en/page/3976>

successful in achieving a nationwide minimum of 35% women among trainees. In contrast, only 10% of Ministry of Education (MoE) TVET students in 2007 were female (MoE, 2007).

In their review of TVET programmes in Afghanistan, Solotaroff et al. (2009) suggest strengthening the existing government's TVET programmes strengthened to promote greater female TVET participation and successful job placement outcomes for women. They identify barriers to female involvement in TVET, including lack of proper educational foundations before women start training, low numbers of female staff and trainers and security risks. Existing TVET programmes have 'limited relevance and appropriateness of curricula to the needs and aspirations of women' (p.4). They offer little skills training in technical fields such as health services, accounting, management and business in which potential employers have expressed an interest in hiring women.

Solotaroff et al. (2009) suggest labour market studies in Afghanistan do not attempt to identify areas of marketable skills demanded by growth sectors that are also culturally appropriate for women. They maintain that the majority of women are still trained in traditional women's work, such as carpet weaving, tailoring and embroidery, for which market demand is limited. They cite MoLSAMD (2008), which suggests that, while English is the most popular course (26% attendance), it is followed by tailoring (14%), computer software (11%), embroidery (11%) and carpet weaving (9%). The authors maintain that 'oversupply' of female trainees in tailoring and embroidery is likely to result in high unemployment (p.2).

2.7 Conclusion

This review of barriers to and opportunities for women's economic empowerment in Afghanistan has shown that the challenge in promoting access to economic opportunities for women in Afghanistan is associated with the need to address structural bottlenecks that result in inequalities between men and women and exclude women from access to productive resources, services and public participation. This means supporting positive changes in gender norms, especially around gender stereotypes and limitations relating to employment. Existing lessons about the effectiveness of TVET programmes in Afghanistan suggest a need to promote female TVET enrolment and improve training and employment outcomes for women, as well as highlighting the importance of adopting a gender-sensitive approach in designing skills training, and promoting marketable technical skills for women.

3 Analytical framework and research questions

3.1 Social exclusion framework

The research uses the social exclusion framework to assess the intervention and analyse the research findings. In their conceptual framework developed for the present study, Babajanian and Hagen-Zanker (2012) suggest the social exclusion lens is well suited to analysis of the transformative effects of social protection interventions. The concept of social exclusion is used in the literature to conceptualise human deprivation and the mechanisms through which it is produced and reproduced. Social exclusion is a dynamic process that ‘precludes full participation in the normatively prescribed activities of a given society and denies access to information, resources, sociability, recognition, and identity, eroding self-respect and reducing capabilities to achieve personal goals’ (Silver, 2007: 1).

Few empirical studies of social protection outside the European context have been framed using the social exclusion/inclusion lens. In developing countries, social exclusion is often used descriptively (rather than as a framework), to refer to negative treatment of specific individuals or social groups. Thus, social exclusion is often used in a literal sense to denote marginalisation of individuals and groups on the basis of specific social characteristics (e.g. gender or ethnicity). In another common usage of this term, social exclusion/inclusion impacts are often confined to the analysis of effects of policies and programmes on various outcomes of human wellbeing (e.g. through poverty and social indicators), without adequate attention to their ability to alter the causes of poverty and vulnerability and promote sustainable change. Narrow focus on the outcomes of interventions may not offer sufficient scope for understanding the extent to which it tackles deep-rooted drivers of female exclusion and vulnerability. It often results in a limited understanding of the potential of policy interventions to tackle structural constraints.

One of the advantages of the social exclusion framework is its simultaneous emphasis on multidimensional aspects of deprivation and the causes of these. Therefore, it can help not only in examining the effects of social protection on different dimensions of deprivation, but also in exposing its ability to tackle broader factors and conditions that produce and reproduce deprivations. In other words, application of the social exclusion framework can help ‘contextualise’ social protection, that is, expose the interplay between policies and programmes and the existing economic, social and institutional forces that shape people’s wellbeing.

Babajanian and Hagen-Zanker (2012) propose that social protection interventions be assessed against their ability to address *outcomes* and *drivers* of social exclusion. The analysis of *outcomes* looks at the extent to which an intervention contributes to enhancing wellbeing within a specific livelihood dimension. The analysis of *drivers* of deprivation and exclusion identifies the extent to which the intervention tackles the factors that limit individual ability to generate sufficient income, access essential services and take part in social and public life. It is important to note also that it is more appropriate to assess the *contribution* of social protection to social inclusion than to expect social protection programmes to fully address all dimensions of social exclusion.

Application of the social exclusion framework to the study of life skills education training and livelihoods training in Afghanistan emphasises the importance of establishing the effects of the interventions as well as assessing the main barriers restricting opportunities for productive employment. Based on the main research questions (Box 2), the study established the effects of the intervention on different dimensions of wellbeing, including employment, empowerment, social relations and relations with authorities. In addition, the research generated evidence on the specific social, economic, and institutional factors affecting positions and opportunities of women in the study communities.

3.2 Research questions

The research was designed as a ‘theory-based’ assessment. It used the theory of change approach to develop a conceptual and analytical basis for designing the inquiry (White, 2009). In particular, developing research questions and hypotheses, the research team distilled the explicit and implicit theoretical assumptions that constitute the theory of change of the intervention. These are underlying assumptions about why and through what causal pathways the intervention is expected to result in desired outcomes.

The study developed the theory of change of the ARC programme based on explicit, stated programme objectives (direct outcomes) as well as implicit objectives, which were not articulated by the ARC programmes (indirect outcomes) (Table 2). These implicit objectives were derived using assertions from the literature about the potential effects of skills training interventions. In particular, the direct outcomes of the life skills education training include knowledge, skills and rights awareness, and those of the livelihoods training ability to engage in the labour market and earn an income. In terms of indirect outcomes, the research hypothesised that the training intervention could contribute to female empowerment, affect social relations and promote engagement with authorities.

Table 2: Direct and indirect outcomes of the skills training interventions

Direct outcomes (explicit objectives)	Indirect outcomes (implicit objectives)
Knowledge, skills and rights awareness (LSET; LT)	Empowerment (household and community) (LT)
Ability to engage in labour market and earn income (LT)	Change in social relations and social networks (LSET; LT)
	Greater engagement with authorities (LSET; LT)

Note: LSET – Life Skills Education Training; LT – Livelihoods Training.

This first research question examines the effects of the training on employment and income generation. As discussed in the literature review, skills training and development are recognised as a priority measure for improving female labour market participation. This research sought to establish the extent to which it has contributed to female employment and wellbeing (Box 2). This research question is based on the theoretical assumption that training can improve young women’s skills and knowledge and help them overcome a key barrier to the labour market. As suggested in the previous section, low literacy rates and limited skills represent a major impediment to paid employment in Afghanistan. Depending on the specific sectoral area of the training module taken, participants will be able to undertake paid business or agricultural activity and generate an income after completion.

Box 2: Research Questions

1. What has been the effect of the life skills education training and the livelihoods training on skills and knowledge, and the ability of young women to benefit from **economic opportunities and earn an income**?
2. What has been the effect of the life skills education training and the livelihoods training on the **empowerment** of participants?
3. How have the life skills education training and the livelihoods training affected **social relations and interaction with authorities**?

The second research question set out to examine the effects of BRAC's training on female **empowerment**. Empowerment in this study is defined as the ability of women to have a greater say in household income spending and have control over their personal income. This is based on the assumption that the ability to earn an income as a result of the livelihoods training may promote a shift in the position of women within the household and enable them greater discretionary authority.

Measuring women's empowerment requires a careful approach. Kabeer (2001) suggests that, depending on how empowerment is conceptualised and measured, evaluators may generate different, often conflicting, understandings, conclusions and interpretations of the effects of policy interventions on it. The complexity of the social and gender relations that may affect empowerment outcomes compound the task. Based on a case study of women garment workers in Bangladesh, Kibria (1995) suggests women's income does not necessarily translate into ability to retain control over wages. She found divergent patterns of control stemming from differences in women's socioeconomic status, which suggests social class has immediate repercussions for women's income control patterns. Kibria maintains that income control does not necessarily guarantee greater family power for women. Evidence revealed that lower-middle-class men allowed women to retain the wages they earned, but this 'affirmed an understanding of women's income as peripheral and inessential to the household economy' (p.306).

In hypothesising the empowerment effect, we were aware that the pathway from employment to women's income control was not straightforward. We therefore utilised qualitative methods to complement the survey results and to assess the availability and extent of empowerment effects.

The third research question examined the effect of the training on **social relations and relations with authorities**. The first assumption here is that participation in the training can affect participants' relationships with their family members and community residents. This change can be both positive and negative. In particular, training can enhance women's knowledge and economic positions, which can promote a change in the attitude and behaviour of other household and community members. On another level, in a context where education and freedom of movement for young females are restricted, participation in training is likely to counter existing social conventions. As a result, it may provoke disapproval, tension and social stigma.

The second hypothesis is that participation in the training is likely to offer opportunities to interact with other girls, possibly their families and training facilitators, and thus to increase participants' social network. Finally, the study assumed that, as a result of new knowledge, awareness and/or increased personal confidence, women may be more willing to engage in the public sphere and interact with local authorities. In particular, they may appeal to local authorities and express their voice with regard to their needs and preferences.

In operationalising the research, the study defined criteria (or indicators) to assess how the assumptions underpinning the theory of change for each research questions were met in real life (Table 3).

Table 3: Outcome dimensions and indicators

Outcome dimensions	Indicators (quantitative/qualitative)
<p>Skills, knowledge and rights awareness Hypothesis:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Life skills education training and livelihoods training enhance beneficiary skills, knowledge and awareness of rights 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Beneficiary perceptions of the usefulness and benefits gained from the training modules Application of knowledge and skills gained as reported by beneficiaries
<p>Economic opportunities and income Hypotheses:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increased skills, knowledge and awareness improve access to economic opportunities (such as farming and entrepreneurial activity) Ability to start or expand existing economic activity enables women to generate an income 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Involvement of respondents in business/agriculture Ability of respondents to generate income from business/agriculture in previous 12 months Employment pattern at time of research Household income in month previous to survey Respondents' perceptions of usefulness of training for accessing jobs and income-generating opportunities
<p>Women's empowerment Hypotheses:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Engagement in income-generating activity enables women to have a greater say in household income spending It enables women greater control over personal income 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ability of respondents to influence decisions on how household/personal income is spent Respondents' perceptions of empowerment effects of training
<p>Social relations Hypotheses:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Participation in training affects relationships (positively and/or negatively) with family members and community residents Participation in training is likely to increase participants' social network 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Beneficiary perceptions of how training affected their relationship with their family and community members Beneficiary perceptions of whether/how their circle of friends and acquaintances has changed as a result of the ARC training
<p>Interaction with authorities Hypothesis:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Training can build confidence and knowledge of women and encourage them to appeal to local authorities and express their voice 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Extent to which respondents appealed to local authorities to find a solution to a problem

In addition to analysing the programme impacts, the research solicited women's views and experiences about the factors that affect their ability to engage in economic activities. In particular, the research inquired about existing opportunities and difficulties in starting and running an income-generating enterprise in the community. It also solicited women's perceptions about existing social barriers to income generation, such as attitudes and behaviour of other family and community members. Finally, the research sought beneficiary views of the appropriateness and effectiveness of the training. This helped us assess the extent to which training design and delivery, including content, duration and quality of instruction, may have affected its outcomes.

4 Methodology

In assessing the extent and nature of the impact, the study used a mixed method approach combining quantitative and qualitative techniques. The research design is *ex-post* quasi-experimental; in the absence of baseline or panel studies, data were collected after the BRAC intervention. In order to measure the impact, the study relied on counterfactual analysis based on the propensity score matching (PSM) method. In addition, it used descriptive statistical analysis of beneficiary and non-beneficiary responses as well as qualitative information conveying beneficiary experiences and perceptions.

As part of the quantitative approach, a household survey questionnaire was administered. The survey compared the treatment group to the control group. The PSM method was used to measure the impact of the intervention. In particular, it made it possible to show the difference in outcomes between the beneficiary and a comparable non-beneficiary group. The non-beneficiary group was considered a proxy control group to represent what would have happened in the absence of the intervention. The non-beneficiary respondents were randomly selected from mapping conducted in the same communities. The mapping exercise matched non-beneficiaries with beneficiaries based on age and educational attainment. The beneficiaries are referred to in this report as the ‘treatment’ group, and non-beneficiaries as the ‘control’ group. The next section gives more details on the PSM method used. In addition to the PSM analysis, the descriptive statistical analysis and qualitative data provided an overall picture of the contribution and usefulness of the intervention based on people’s perceptions, assessment and knowledge of their lives and experiences.

All the beneficiaries had completed the three-month ARC programme, which was offered once in all the study communities – in Kabul communities from March to June 2011 and in Parwan from June to August 2011. In total, 364 respondents (each from a different household), with an even split between beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries, were interviewed in 13 villages (Table 4). The treatment group was composed of 182 young women aged 14 years and above who had participated in both the life skills education training and the livelihood training between 2007 and 2010. The control group was made up of 182 young women from the same geographic areas as the treatment group, with similar characteristics, who had not participated in training. These girls were eligible for the training, but some chose not to participate, whereas others were not selected, owing to quota restrictions.

Table 4: Distribution of sample (quantitative method)

Province	District	No. of villages	Rural/urban	Non-beneficiary	Beneficiary	Total
Kabul	District 5	3	Urban	35	35	70
	Mir Bacha Kot	2	Rural	27	32	59
Parwan	Jabul Seraj	5	Rural	79	79	158
	Charikar	3	Urban	41	36	77
Total		13	Rural	106	111	217
			Urban	76	71	147
			Total	182	182	364

The research was conducted in 13 communities, 5 in Kabul and 8 in Parwan provinces. These areas were selected as they presented less security risk and were relatively easier to access than other provinces. The survey covered all communities in these two provinces where both the life skills education training and the livelihoods training were implemented. The research team conducted a field mapping of beneficiaries in the study areas in order to verify and update the lists of beneficiaries obtained from BRAC. The sample included all individuals in the study communities who had taken both trainings. Eleven beneficiaries in the sample refused to take part in the study. All instruments were translated into Dari and were administered in the Dari language.

Figure 1: Map of sampled area



The qualitative approach involved 26 focus group discussions (FGDs) with 76 beneficiaries and 75 non-beneficiaries; and semi-structured in-depth interviews (IDIs) with 21 beneficiaries and 14 non-beneficiaries (Table 5). Qualitative interviews were conducted in all communities in the sample. The participants were selected from the respondents of the survey who were willing and available for qualitative interviews. In addition, key informant interviews (KIIs) were conducted with 7 BRAC facilitators and 15 community stakeholders from each village covered by the study in both provinces. Community stakeholders included teachers, shopkeepers, village leaders and other persons who held influential positions in the community.

Table 5: Distribution of participants and key informants (qualitative method)

Province	District	No. of villages	Rural/urban	CQs	KIIs	Non-beneficiaries		Beneficiaries		Total
						FGDs	IDIs	FGDs	IDIs	
Kabul	District 5	3	Urban	3	6	17	4	17	4	51
	Mir Bacha Kot	2	Rural	2	6	11	2	12	4	37
Parwan	Jabul Seraj	5	Rural	5	6	29	5	29	9	83
	Charikar	3	Urban	3	4	18	3	18	4	47
Total		13	Rural	7	12	40	7	41	13	120
			Urban	6	10	35	7	35	8	101
			Total	13	22	75	14	76	21	221

The qualitative approach revealed respondents' perceptions and experiences and generated rich contextual evidence to ensure in-depth exploration of the issues. The researchers adopted a flexible, exploratory approach to semi-structured interviews. Based on the research questions and hypotheses (Table 3), the team developed interview guides, which contained separate thematic sections with associated open-ended questions. Most questions in the interview guides served as topics. They provided indication of the issues to be explored, with the actual questions formulated during the interview. Depending on the context of the interview, the researchers modified the order of these topics. They retained an open conversational interviewing style in order to allow respondents to digress towards issues they deemed important. Researchers worded questions in neutral language and in a way that was accessible for respondents.

In preparation for the fieldwork, AREU conducted two rounds of training for the interviewers. The first was a two-day formal activity held in October 2012, which included general instructions and practice interviews. This was followed by a pilot test, in which the research instruments were pre-tested. The pilot test was conducted in two urban areas and one rural area in two districts in Kabul province. It included five FGDs, 6 KIIs, 16 beneficiary IDIs and 13 non-beneficiary IDIs.

Refresher training was then implemented to address specific questions and situations emerging as a result of the pilot tests. This was a four-day activity held in December 2012. Collection of quantitative and qualitative data started on 20 December 2012 and took 40 days. This was followed, in February to March 2013, by checking and verification of responses and data entry. Analysis and report write-up was conducted between April and December 2013.

One of the challenges the research team faced was quick staff turnover at BRAC. The team found incomplete project documentation and that there was little institutional memory in place to help in identifying some processes and procedures, as people who had been implementing the project were no longer around. Many training facilitators at the community level were no longer employed and were not available for interview.

5 Propensity score matching

The quantitative analysis involved two distinct stages. In the first stage, detailed descriptive statistics were produced, measuring the statistical significance of differences between the control and the treatment groups. The results were grouped around the outcome dimensions, as described in Table 3. Findings from the descriptive statistics were then used as a basis for the next stage, in which those outcome variables that showed differences between the groups were used for PSM analysis. Stata software was used to conduct the quantitative analysis.

The objective of the econometric analysis was to discern whether the ARC programme had had an impact on different outcome indicators as outlined in Section 2. Impact in this context can be defined as differences on specific outcome indicators between the treatment and the control groups. The control group is taken as a proxy for an actual counterfactual and was selected carefully to be similar to the treatment group, apart from not receiving the treatment. As highlighted above, our design is *ex-post* quasi-experimental – the data are collected after treatment has taken place and we have neither baseline nor panel data. Hence, we employed PSM, which is a well-regarded quasi-experimental research method to measure impact.

The basic idea behind PSM is that, when comparing outcomes for the control and the treatment groups, the results will still be biased as there may be observed (i.e. ‘measurable’) and unobserved differences between the groups that we have not controlled for. The PSM approach (Rosenbaum and Rubin, 1983) seeks to eliminate the observed bias by comparing each beneficiary household to a very similar non-beneficiary counterpart based on characteristics that are not influenced by the outcome variable – called pre-treatment factors (resulting in a so-called propensity score).

Beneficiary and non-beneficiary households are ‘matched’ on the basis of their propensity score and their outcomes are compared. The difference in outcomes can then be attributed to the intervention. However, this method can control only for observable characteristics. Unobservable variables, such as ‘the individual’s inclination to take risks’ or ‘being a progressive family’, cannot be measured in a quantitative survey.

Propensity scores are defined as the probability that a person would participate in the programme given a set of pre-treatment variables. The objective of the pre-treatment variable is to measure the likelihood of receiving treatment. In doing so, it is important to consider what factors make control households distinct from treated units. One obvious set of factors to include in PSM estimation are the official and unofficial criteria used in determining participation in the intervention, such as a project or programme’s eligibility or admission criteria (factors associated with both self-selection and administrative selection), which we have done here. Table 6 shows the official selection criteria.

Table 6: ARC selection criteria and pre-treatment criteria used

ARC member selection criteria	Pre-treatment variables used to address criteria
Must be female aged 15-20 years (they took younger and older girls/women in actual implementation)	Female/male ratio in household
	No. of females in household
	No. of 15-20-year-old females/or its ration to family size ratio
	Age of respondent
Primary-level education (few were taken in even if they reached higher level because of the intervention of village leaders)	(Female no.)/(male no.) who completed primary education
	Respondent 17 and above have completed primary education
Giving priority to BRAC ex-students	Respondent dropped out school without graduation (more chance of BRAC school student)
	Formal school/ <i>madrasah</i> is far from home according to respondent (more chance of BRAC school student)
Giving priority to housewives	Respondent is housewife (measured by hours spent on household chores and married)
	Respondent is married/widow and not in job
	How long it takes to fetch water, in minutes (more likely to be done by housewives if long)
	Marital status of respondent is widow/separated
	Spouse is farmer (more chance of pre-treatment housewife)
Members' residence walking distance from centre	Village dummies as proxies for distance of selected villages from ARC/village dummies
40% of total members from current students of formal schools	Respondent is currently a formal school student
	Housing characteristics as pre-treatment indicators (no. of rooms per person in household and dummy variables representing roof and floor material)

Some of these pre-treatment variables were excluded in the analysis of a particular outcome variable, because they either are not different between the treatment and the control groups or are expected to be affected by the outcome. Table 6 gives a complete overview of which pre-treatment variables were used for which specific analysis.

The ARC training programmes had clear selection criteria, but these were not always strictly observed. Some eligible females did not wish to be included in the training programmes; instead, ineligible beneficiaries were included. More specifically, these included girls who were outside the eligible age of 15-20 years old. Among the 182 beneficiaries, 15% were aged 14 years and below at the time of training and 16% 21 years old and above. These also included girls with interrupted schooling but who had completed primary education (ARC criteria restricted eligibility to those with primary education). The pre-treatment variables took account of the fact that, in some cases, the selection criteria were not adhered to. For example, instead of only matching

beneficiaries with non-beneficiaries in the 15-20-year-old age group, we also considered other criteria as proxies for the age criteria, for example number of females/males in the household.

The pre-treatment variables used to calculate the propensity score have to meet a number of assumptions, all of which were considered here. First, they have to satisfy the conditional independence assumption (CIA). This means the pre-treatment variables should not be affected by the outcomes we are estimating. The pre-treatment variables were selected carefully in order to meet this condition. Some of these always remain fixed (e.g. distance to ARC). In order to obtain a balanced group, we used the higher-order terms of the continuous covariates and cross products of the pre-treatment variables.

Second, PSM also requires a so-called ‘common support’, which means treatment and control households have a similar distribution of propensity scores. We decided to exclude observations that were ‘off’ common support, thereby strengthening the analysis. We have adequate common support for all analyses.

Third, the pre-treatment variables must pass the *balancing property*, which implies that households with the same propensity score must show the same distribution of pre-treatment variables. In other words, the balancing property is satisfied when the pre-treatment variables are all statistically the same between the treatment and the control groups. We examine this by comparing the differences (called the standardised percentage bias) across pre-treatment variables, before and after matching. These show that, for the majority of pre-treatment variables, which were dissimilar (the majority of the mean values are significantly different between the beneficiary and the non-beneficiary groups) before matching, they were more similar after matching (mean values are statistically the same between the beneficiary and the non-beneficiary groups)

As the above tests show that the results are valid,⁸ we can now match households and calculate impact. Different matching algorithms are available to match treated and control observation with the estimated propensity scores. We employed nearest neighbour matching and radius matching. The former selects households in the control group as matching partners for beneficiaries, on the basis of the closest propensity scores (Abadie and Imbens, 2006; Abadie et al., 2004). In order to ensure the robustness of the findings, we applied radius matching as a second matching method. We used matching with replacement.

Once households are matched, average effect of treatment on the treated (ATT) is calculated. This is a measure of the impact the intervention has had on the specified outcomes for the treatment group. The results have also been tested for statistical significance. The PSM results are presented in Sections 11-14 together with other findings.

⁸ The figures and detailed test results are available from the authors upon request.

6 Ethical considerations

Respondents were assured of their anonymity and that the information they gave was confidential. The researchers ensured that all respondents were anonymised through coding in the interview transcripts and subsequent usage of data in the analysis.

The research team explained to all potential participants the objectives of the study and the interviews. They were assured that they could relate their own experiences and any issues with regard to training facilitation without fear of consequences from the facilitator, who was from the same community. They were also assured that their answers would not affect BRAC's assistance to the community. The facilitator/interviewer further confirmed there were no 'wrong' answers, and highlighted the importance of respondents' views and experiences.

Permission was sought from interviewed girls' parents: team members explained to family members why girls were being interviewed for the study to allay fears and to avoid refusals by girl beneficiaries (because family members would not allow them to be interviewed).

The research team spent considerable time introducing the study and its purpose to the leaders of the community, former BRAC teachers who lived in the community and community members.

Team members identified safe spaces other than the home where girls could be interviewed. In some cases, girls' mobility was restricted (e.g. the centres where the trainings were held were safe places but at times the facilitator was present, which may have affected the answers girls gave). The team sought to interview girls without the presence of other people in order to minimise possible influence of other family members. Some interviews were conducted in the homes of beneficiaries' friends.

Team members saw to it that schedules of interviews and FGDs were convenient for participants and also their family members. Piloting the tools took place in the week before Eid, which meant the team had to adjust the schedule to suit the availability of the girls, as they were preparing for the festival (cleaning, decorating and preparing food).

7 Introducing BRAC's adolescent reading centres

BRAC implemented the Girls' Education Project (GEP) between 2007 and 2011 with financial support from the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA). The goal was to promote gender equality through basic education by establishing educational facilities that would supplement the efforts of Afghanistan's MoE.

The four components of GEP are: i) community-based schools (CBSs); ii) ARCs; iii) Quality Enhancement of Public Schools (QEPS); and iv) Research and New Initiatives (RNI). Students in CBSs are expected eventually to join public schools. The ARCs, on the other hand, target girls of 15-20 years of age who have dropped out from school and are not likely to continue their education.

School dropouts can occur for a number of reasons. Conservative families often decide to interrupt girls' education when girls reach puberty. Other factors that contribute to interrupted education for girls include lack of girls' schools in the area and long distances of schools from the community. Another reason might be when schools are close to bazaars, which are crowded market areas: family members often do not allow girls to pass bazaars on their way to school as they are exposed to men. Section 8 discusses study respondents' reasons for dropping out of school.

ARCs are based on the principle of a home-based rural library. BRAC Afghanistan rents space for ARCs and the girls meet for two and a half hours in the afternoon, twice a week, for the three-month duration of the ARC programme. As mentioned earlier, the ARC programme ran in Kabul communities from March to June 2011 and in Parwan from June to August 2011.

The ARCs are designed to provide girls with a safe space to socialise and remain engaged in the learning process even after they have stopped attending school. Participants have the opportunity to receive life skills education training and livelihoods training. Life skills education training is a five-day course that discusses general and reproductive health and children's and women's rights. The livelihoods training offers skills to allow participants to become economically self-reliant. The latter course lasts three months and skills include embroidery, bag making, tailoring, livestock raising and food processing. As part of socialising, participants can meet other girls of their age, chat with peers, share problems, read storybooks and magazines and take part in recreational activities and board games.

Priority is given to former BRAC students who are not continuing with any formal education, as well as to housewives. The specific selection criteria include:

- Female aged 15-20 years;
- Of primary-level education;
- Living within a walking distance from the centre; and
- Unable to continue their education in public schools (40%).

The ARC facilitators are an essential part of the programme, as they facilitate community support for the programme as well as ensuring that trainings within the ARC are implemented successfully. Facilitators need to fulfil the following criteria:

- Education level of Grade 5 to 7;
- At least one leader having undergone BRAC training;
- Have a strong interest in group facilitation;
- Active and spontaneous;
- Between the ages of 15 and 20 so they can relate to participants; and
- Have leadership skills and eagerness and be well accepted in the community and among ARC members.

Former teachers of BRAC schools are given priority in ARC facilitator selection.

Section 8 discusses the specific social, demographic and economic characteristics of the ARC beneficiaries in the study locations based on the primary data generated through this research.

As a reward for participation in ARC centres, BRAC through a partnership with the World Food Programme (WFP) distributed food parcels, including wheat, vegetable oil, pulses and salt, to beneficiaries in three study areas in Kabul and six of the eight study areas in Parwan. In Kabul, food parcels were distributed to beneficiaries at the end of each month during the three-month period of the programme. This should have been the case for the other areas, but a delay in the procurement of materials meant food parcels were distributed twice instead of three times within the programme period, at the end of the second month (good for two months) and at the end of the third month.

Joining the ARC programme was free, and only 16% of 182 beneficiary respondents suggested their participation invoked some monetary cost (Table A1.1 in the Annex). These costs were for paperwork (for five people), materials (three people), transport (two people) and petrol for transportation on own vehicle (one person). These participants spent an average of AFs 385.56 (\$7). Only 2 of 182 respondents (1%) reported having experienced inconvenience as a result of queuing and waiting when applying for the ARC programme. This suggests there were no major administrative and financial barriers to enrolment.

8 Characteristics of the respondents

The respondents were 17 years old on average, with 10% of them married. Most respondents lived in male-headed households. The majority (137, or 75%) were daughters of the household head, 19 (10%) were sisters of the household head and 17 (9%) were spouses of the household head. Only two of the beneficiary respondents (1%) were household heads themselves. The overwhelming majority of respondents belonged to the Tajik ethnic group and were Sunni Muslims (Table A1.2 in the Annex).

For nearly half of respondents, the *madrasah* system was the main education provider. The dropout rate was high in both groups. Only 12% of beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries had completed primary school (Grades 6 and 8) and 8% of beneficiaries and 1% of non-beneficiaries had completed secondary school (Grade 9).

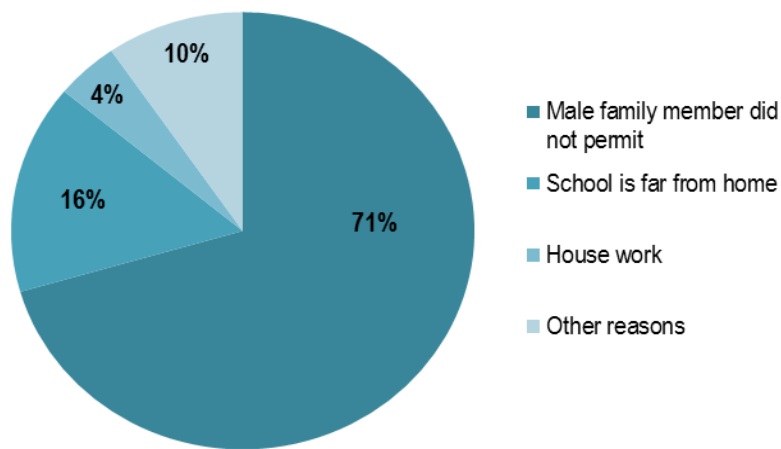
Table 7: Respondent characteristics, by beneficiary households

Respondent characteristics	Non-beneficiary		Beneficiary		Absolute difference	
	Mean	Standard dev.	Mean	Standard dev.	Diff. in mean	t-statistics
Age (years)	17.28	4.24	18.92	7.53	1.64	2.56***
Marital status (married=1)	0.077	0.267	0.110	0.314	0.33	1.08
Education (dummy variables)						
<i>Madrasah</i> education=1	0.522	0.501	0.330	0.471	0.19	3.77***
Incomplete primary school (Grades 1-5)=1	0.060	0.239	0.104	0.307	0.04	1.52
Completed primary school (finished Grade 6)	0.121	0.327	0.126	0.333	0.01	0.16
Incomplete secondary school (Grades 7-8)	0.027	0.164	0.044	0.206	0.02	0.84
Completed secondary school (finished Grade 9)	0.016	0.128	0.082	0.276	0.07	2.93***
Some high school (Grades 10-11)	0.011	0.105	0.027	0.164	0.02	1.14
Respondent dropped out of school without graduating (yes=1)	0.802	0.399	0.769	0.422	0.03	0.76
Working status (yes=1)	0.005	0.074	0.027	0.164	0.02	1.65*

Note: * significant at 10%; ** significant at 5%; *** significant at 1%

The main reason for dropouts relates to existing social norms that restrict female education (Figure 2). In particular, 177 of a total of 251 respondents (or 70%) said a family member had withheld permission, with an almost equal number for beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries. The following sections discuss the effect of gender norms on girls' education and women's employment in more detail. Other reasons included the distance of schools from home (39 respondents, 15%) and the need to do housework (11 respondents, or 4%).

Figure 2: Reasons for female respondents dropping out of school before completion or without graduating any level

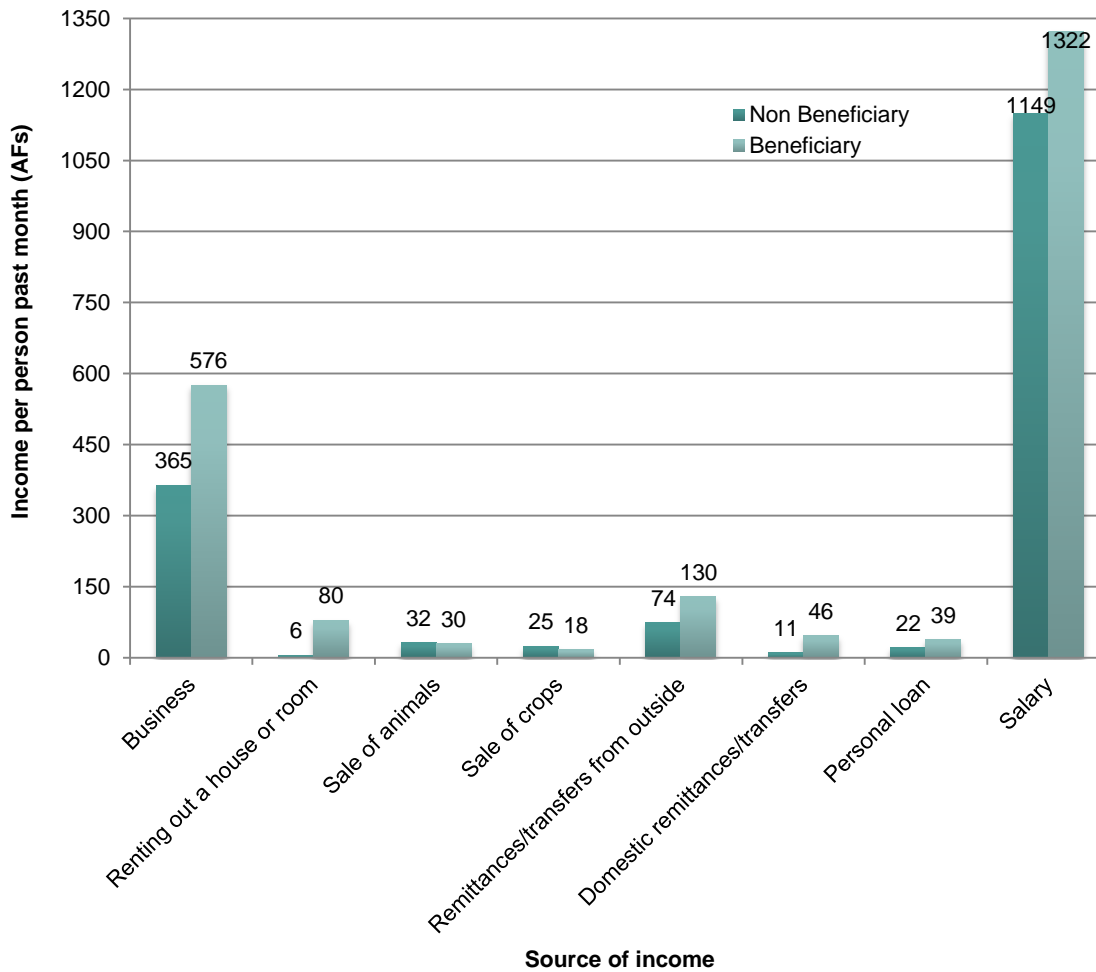


Very few respondents in either group were working at the time of the survey. A higher share of beneficiaries (five persons, or 3%) were working at the time of the survey compared with non-beneficiaries (one person, or 0.5%).

In both provinces, the occupational patterns of household heads were diverse. Over one-third of all household heads were engaged in trade, and a quarter worked as waged labourers and unskilled workers (Table A1.3 in the Annex). Farming was a minor occupation in the study locations.

Figure 3 shows average household income from different sources. For both beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries, salaried jobs and business activities were the main sources of income, resulting in the highest average income. Variations in income earned from business and salaries were not statistically significant.

Figure 3: Per capita household income, by source



Note: This average was calculated based on the number of households that had an income from the particular source. In some cases, averages were calculated using only a few households because others did not engage in this activity. Therefore, caution should be taken in interpreting the figure.

Beneficiary households reported having earned a significantly higher income per person in the month prior to the survey, at AFs 2,160 (\$39), than non-beneficiaries did (AFs 1,790, or \$32). This income is higher than the minimum cost of basic needs defined by the 2007/08 poverty line, which was set in the 2007/08 National Risk and Vulnerability Assessment at AFs 1,255 per person per month, based on calculation of the typical cost of attaining 2,100 calories per person per day and of meeting some basic non-food needs (MRRD and CSO, n.d.). Section 11 discusses the difference in income.

9 Life skills education training: perceptions of usefulness and practical application

This section examines beneficiary perspectives of the usefulness of the life skills education training and its application in practice.

There were four modules. Nearly half of the beneficiaries (87 persons, or 48%) took the Health Module, 71 the Education Module (39%), and 15 the VAW Module and Children's Rights Module (8%) (Table 8). Only six beneficiaries (3%) reported having taken all the training modules.

Participants said they had gained useful knowledge and skills. Nearly all beneficiaries (84 of 87, 97%) who took the Health Module felt they had obtained knowledge on general health and nearly half of them (42, or 48%) had improved their practical knowledge of reproductive health issues. Of 71 beneficiaries who took the Education Module, three-quarters (75%) said the training had helped them improve or gain literacy skills and more than half (58%) felt it had improved their awareness of their rights.

Table 8: Modules taken and knowledge/benefits gained from life skills education training

Modules taken by beneficiaries (multiple responses)	No.	% of 182
Health	87	47.8
Education	71	39.0
VAW	15	8.2
Children's rights	15	8.2
All of the above	6	3.3
Knowledge and benefits gained from Health Module (multiple responses possible)	No.	% of 87
Practical knowledge on general health	84	96.6
Practical knowledge on reproductive health issues	42	48.3
Knowledge and benefits gained from Education Module (multiple responses possible)	No.	% of 71
Literacy	53	74.6
Awareness of rights for themselves	41	57.7
Awareness of rights for children	18	25.4

Table 9 provides information on the application of knowledge gained from the life skills education. Nearly all beneficiaries reported that they had applied the knowledge obtained. In particular, 65% of respondents reported that, as a result of their new knowledge, they had used general health services; more than a third had used reproductive health services.

Table 9: Application of knowledge gained from life skills education training

Application of knowledge gained (multiple responses possible)	No.	% of 182
Applied knowledge gained from programme	175	96.2
Used general health services	118	64.8
Used reproductive health services	58	31.8
Offered advice to a friend/relative	62	34.0
Dealt with violence	49	26.9
Made a school-related decision	33	18.1
Dealt with negative attitudes with respect to gender	18	9.8

Many participants of the Health Module said they had learned about the need to refer to health care professionals in the case of illness. Respondents suggested the training had made them conscious of the importance of addressing their own health and that of their family members. For instance, a 29-year-old beneficiary from DA said that, thanks to her new knowledge, she went to a doctor in case of illness:

Yes, I have more knowledge about health and education and I have become aware of them. I use them in my daily life. For example, from the Health Module, I received more information about cleanliness [...] I got much information and now whenever I become sick I go to the clinic and take medicines (in-depth interview with M in DA, Kabul).

Many beneficiaries said that, thanks to the Health Module, they had learned about washing hands after toilet use, taking a bath daily and wearing clean clothes. Testimonies from FGDs reflect overwhelmingly positive perceptions of the usefulness of this training in the daily lives of the beneficiaries:

Yes, now I know what to do to get better when I am sick. Also, now, I make sure my children are clean. In the past, I did not know that keeping oneself clean was useful (focus group participant F2 in FB, Kabul).

Yes, I learned about general health that I should wash my hands with water and soap after using toilet and eating food (focus group participant P in KG, Kabul).

The knowledge transferred through the life skills education training also benefited the household members of the participants. For instance, some of the girls shared new knowledge on personal hygiene with the rest of their family members. For example, one female respondent, in MK said,

Yes, the health session helped me a lot in my daily life and we should be clean; now I tell all my family members that after coming out of the toilet, they should wash their hands with soap and pure water so as not to become sick and avoid diseases (in-depth interview with M in MK, Parwan).

Similarly, another respondent in MK suggested,

Now, I am saying to all my family members that, after coming out of the toilet, they should wash their hands with soap (in-depth interview with H in MK, Parwan).

The Education Module taught basic literacy skills and education rights awareness, and was also perceived to be useful. Some beneficiaries reported that, as they had learned to read and write, they were able to help their younger siblings or children with their homework:

The Education Module was important for me; I learned how to read and write. Now I am very happy and I am teaching my small sister reading and writing (focus group participant F4 in KK, Parwan).

Through the Education Module, I can help my children with their studies [...] I am helping my children with their homework. During their exams I am studying with them (in-depth interview with M in DA, Kabul).

Yes, the Education Module helped me, I can teach my little brothers and sisters and I can help them, before I couldn't help them in their school subjects; now after going to the course and attending the sessions I can help them (focus group participant A in DA, Kabul).

The qualitative interviews suggest one of the key lessons many beneficiaries learned involved a realisation that education was a woman's right:

I got awareness about education, that if we are educated then we can solve our problems, I learned about children's rights, that they should go to school and study and people should encourage them (focus group participant Z in DA, Kabul).

The ARC course was very useful for me. I learned tailoring and embroidery and I got much information about health and my rights. Now, I am aware of my rights. That men and women have the same rights to receive education. If boys can go to school, why not girls? (focus group participant F4 in Pt11-2, Parwan).

Yes, I learned tailoring and I learned about my rights and children's rights, that I am human and I also can work outside or inside the home to earn an income. Also children have this right to go to school, to be educated (in-depth interview with H in Pt11-3, Parwan).

The qualitative interviews with the training facilitators confirmed that the training had an important educational value for participants. These respondents believed the ARC gave girls the chance to gain in literacy and increase their awareness or knowledge on reproductive health and women and children's rights. For instance, facilitators in Pt 11-3 and MK in Parwan believed beneficiaries received new relevant information about health and housekeeping as part of the Health Module, as well as rights awareness. A 19-year-old former ARC facilitator from MK, a rural community in Parwan, said, in addition to literacy skills and tailoring, the modules made women aware of health issues and children's rights.

Overall, the majority of beneficiaries found the training useful, with its contribution to girls' knowledge on health, literacy skills and rights awareness seemingly among the key perceived benefits. The survey and qualitative data suggest a considerable share of beneficiaries have utilised their new knowledge of health, for example by seeing a doctor to address a health concern and improving personal/household hygiene practices. Qualitative evidence indicates girls have used their literacy skills to help children in the household with homework.

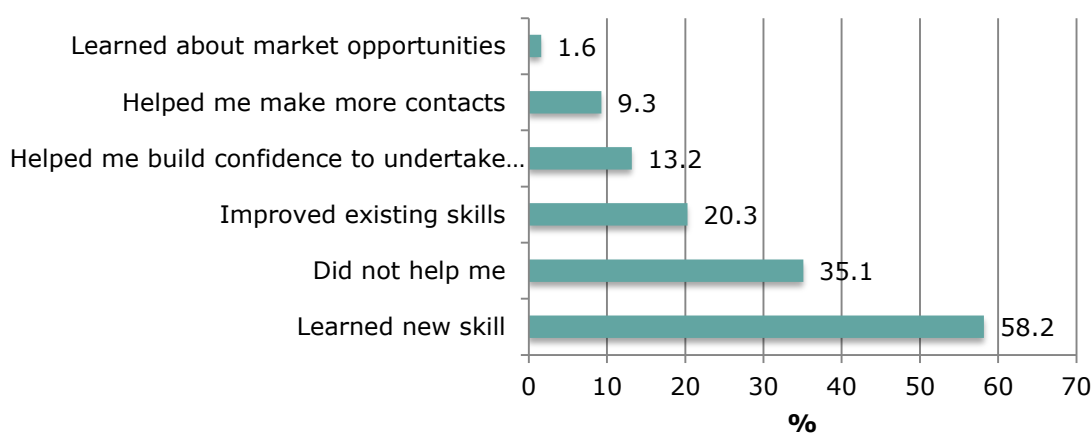
10 Livelihoods training: perceptions of usefulness and practical application

This section examines respondents' perceptions about the usefulness and application of the knowledge and skills offered by the livelihoods training.

A total of 150 beneficiary respondents (82%) subscribed to the Tailoring Module, 35 (19%) to Embroidery, 19 (10%) to Small Livestock Raising and 10 (6%) to Bag Making. One person (0.6%) subscribed to Carpet Making and one to Food Processing (Table A1.4 in the Annex).

Looking at girls' perceptions of the benefits gained from the modules (Figure 4), nearly two-thirds considered them useful and approximately a third did not find them useful. In general, respondents who had applied the knowledge from the programme said the training had helped them learn new skills, had improved existing skills, had given them more confidence and had increased their social contacts. More than half of beneficiaries (106, 58%) reported gaining new skills and 37 (20%) suggested they had improved existing skills. Twenty-four beneficiaries (13%) felt they had gained more confidence to undertake income-generating activity, and nineteen (10%) suggested they were able to make more contacts. About a third of beneficiaries did not feel they had gained anything useful. Later in this section, we discuss some of their beneficiary criticisms generated by the qualitative assessment with regard to the effectiveness of the training for skills development.

Figure 4: Knowledge and benefits gained from livelihoods training



Note: Multiple responses possible

In another question the study asked, whether beneficiaries were able to apply the knowledge gained (Table 10). Only a small share of beneficiaries reported they were able to apply their knowledge in business; the overwhelming majority did not. Almost two-thirds of respondents said they were able to apply the knowledge gained from the training overall (not necessarily in business). The most widespread application of knowledge was the use of new skills in sewing clothes for personal use (80 respondents, or 44%). Other responses included starting a business (23, or 13%), sewing clothes for themselves and other family members (13, or 7%) and application in an existing business (3, or 2%).

Table 10: Application of knowledge gained from livelihoods training

Application of knowledge gained	No.	% of 182
Applied knowledge gained from the programme	119	65.4
Type of application (multiple responses possible)		
Sewed clothes for herself	80	43.9
Started a business	23	12.6
Sewed clothes for herself and family	13	7.1
Used in existing business	3	1.6
Other	3	1.6

The qualitative assessment corroborates that the training helped some beneficiaries to engage in business. Thus, 6 of 21 IDI participants (27%) and 13 of 76 FGD participants (17%) reported that they had applied their tailoring skills in business and earned an income. The age of the youngest beneficiary in Kabul who found an income after engaging in ARC trainings was 19; that of the oldest was 36.⁹ In Parwan, the youngest beneficiary to conduct an income-generating activity was 16 and the oldest was 28. The following are some beneficiaries' testimonies of engagement in business and income generation as a result of training in three communities:

Yes, the training was very helpful for me, I learned tailoring. Now I can sew my clothes and my children's clothes. For other women also I am sewing clothes and taking money from them. I have a good income from my tailoring. The amount for each dress that I take is Afs 150-200. I have an income, I can earn money and I feel very happy. Before, for each of my small needs I was taking money from my husband, but now I am independent. I have money myself and I can spend that anywhere I want (in-depth interview with M in DA, Kabul).

Yes, the training was very helpful for me. I learned tailoring. Now, I can sew my clothes and my family's clothes, and for other women I also make clothes and take money from them. I have a good income from tailoring, before I was taking money from my husband, but now I am independent. I have money and I can spend that anywhere (in-depth interview with M in NB, Kabul).

Yes, this course helped me a lot. Now, I can make a dress for myself and also I am making dresses for others and taking money from them. I also learned embroidery. I am doing this at home and selling [my products] to people outside (in-depth interview with F1 in FB, Kabul).

Beneficiaries in qualitative interviews reported that the Tailoring Module had enabled them to make clothes for themselves and their family members. Making dresses for themselves and family members helped save money. For example, participants of FGDs in DB, Parwan and NB, Kabul, and an IDI respondent Z in KKh, Parwan suggested that sewing clothes for themselves and family members helped save household money as they no longer needed to pay for a tailor:

⁹ As mentioned earlier, eligibility criteria for inclusion in ARC programmes were not always observed and some beneficiary respondents were outside the eligible age range.

Yes, the training was so useful for us. We got so [many] benefits from this course, especially the economic aspect. The tailoring was so useful because we learned how to make a dress for ourselves and also for family members. When I am tailoring in my home, it means I save my father's money. So, it is a great help for my family in the economic sense (in-depth interview with Z in KKh, Parwan).

BRAC facilitators (M in FB, Kabul, R in NB, Kabul and S in Prt-11-3, Parwan) believed the training enabled girls to make clothes for themselves and other family members as well as to earn income from tailoring:

Tailoring helped them a lot in their daily life, now they can make clothes for themselves and for their families and relatives and they can get income from that, they can help their families with their income (key informant M in FB, Kabul).

Non-beneficiary participants felt beneficiaries were placed in a more advantageous position through learning about health and acquiring practical skills and the capacity to engage in livelihood activities, such as tailoring (focus group participants N in Prt11-3, Parwan and A in FB, Kabul, and in-depth interview respondents M in PM, Parwan and R in AZ, Kabul). For example, R in AZ said:

Yes, it is clear that they are better than us. Now, they know most of things that we don't know. As I told you, some of the girls are into tailoring now. They no longer pay for tailors, but we pay for them to make our clothes. Still, those who attended [the ARC] couldn't start a business. They just do something for themselves (in-depth interview with R in AZ, Kabul).

Respondents who did not engage in tailoring considered insufficient skills to be the primary reason for not being able to undertake income-generating activities after the training. Those engaged in business appeared to have a basic level of knowledge of tailoring before the course was introduced, and the training enabled them to strengthen their skills and become proficient. Those who started the course without prior knowledge were not able to learn sufficient skills to make clothes for money:

Yes, the ARC course helped me to tailor. But I am not such an expert to make a good and nice dress. But I also can solve my problem. I can make my dress the way I want (focus group participant M in NB, Kabul).

No, it has not helped me obtain a job and have an income because I could not learn the skill properly (in-depth interview with L in Prt11-1, Parwan).

No, the ARC course did not help me get a job because I could not learn tailoring skills properly [...] I can only make my own dress (focus group participant B in TK, Parwan).

We did not have a machine to work with and learn tailoring well, that's why I can't sew cloths, but I learnt pas dozi and bakhia [basic tricks of tailoring] (focus group participant S in KG, Kabul).

Some respondents said the duration of the training was too short to enable them to learn sufficient skills:

I didn't learn that much well to have a job and to start a small business for myself; it was not their fault, because the duration of the course was too short, that's why I didn't learn well (focus group participant Y in AZ, Kabul).

The duration of the course was only three months. We didn't learn properly. So it didn't help us to get a job and earn money (focus group participant F4 in KKh, Parwan).

Tailoring was helpful for me. Now, I can make dresses for myself and for my family members, but I cannot make them for others because I didn't learn quite well. At that time, the course was too short (in-depth interview with M in MK, Parwan).

Beneficiary perceptions generated by the quantitative survey attest to the fact that the livelihoods training was not effective in fostering adequate skills. Thus, 43% of survey beneficiary respondents referred to lack of skills as one of the key reasons for not engaging in business in the previous 12 months (see Table 13, Section 12).

It is not realistic to expect all training beneficiaries to acquire excellent skills and to engage equally in income generation. Learning ability can also affect the outcome here. Thus, not all beneficiaries have similar aptitudes for learning, and it is natural for a training to result in variable learning outcomes. Furthermore, some people have innate ability or talent. For example, setting up a tailoring business requires excellent tailoring skills as well as entrepreneurial qualities such as being willing to take risks and attract clients. These are unobservable variables and cannot easily be measured. Yet the fact that the training did not help the overwhelming majority of beneficiaries engage in business points to shortcomings in the training's design and implementation and/or context-related factors.

In conclusion, more than half of beneficiaries reported gaining new skills and a fifth suggested they had improved existing skills. Almost two-thirds said they were able to apply the knowledge gained from the training. The most widespread application was the use of new skills for making clothes for personal use and for other family members.

Only a small share of all beneficiaries (13%, or 23 of 182) reported being able to utilise their skills in starting a business. Qualitative interviews confirmed that only 19 participants of the livelihoods training were able to engage in business and earn an income. These effects are small, which explains the results of PSM analysis – discussed in the next section – suggesting the training did not have a significant employment generation effect.

The research generated evidence that helps explain the employment generation effects of the training. A third of beneficiaries felt they did not gain much from the livelihoods training. Respondents in the qualitative assessment suggested the training did not enable them to acquire sufficient tailoring skills in order to make clothes for money. This is corroborated by quantitative evidence from this research suggesting that 43% of all beneficiaries felt lack of skills prevented them from engaging in business in general (Table 13, Section 12). Section 12 discusses other factors that account for the limited economic opportunities affecting women in the study communities.

11 Impact analysis: livelihoods training and business activity

This section examines the impact of the livelihoods training on engagement in business and income generation. It draws on descriptive statistics and PSM analysis.

Based on the PSM results, beneficiaries were 2.8% more likely to be working at the time of the survey compared with non-beneficiaries (Table 12). While this is a positive and significant impact, it is clearly low and shows that the impact of the livelihoods training on the likelihood of working has been small.

This is confirmed when we zoom in on respondents working in business. The share of respondents involved in business is small, with only 28 of all respondents engaged in business in the past 12 months (Table 11). A greater number of beneficiaries (10%, or 18 of 182) compared with non-beneficiaries (6%, or 10 of 182) were engaged in business but, given the low number of observations, we need to be careful in drawing conclusions about differences between the two groups. The PSM analysis shows that, while beneficiaries were slightly more likely to be engaged in business, this difference is not statistically significant (Table 12).

Table 11: Engagement in business among beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries of livelihoods training

Business activity	Non-beneficiary	Beneficiary	Total	Mean difference t-test
% (no.) engaged in business in past 12 months	5.5 (10)	9.9 (18)	7.7 (28)	NS
No. of cases	182	182	364	
Business in past 12 months (% of total engaged in business in past 12 months):				
Craft making for sale (carpets, bags etc.)	30.0 (3)	5.6 (1)	14.3	**
Food processing for sale (e.g. bread, cheese)	50.0 (5)	5.6 (1)	21.4	***
Business selling services (e.g. tailor/hairdresser)	20.0 (2)	88.9 (16)	64.3	***
No. of cases	10	18	28	

Note: * significant at 10%; ** significant at 5%; *** significant at 1%.

When looking at the type of business activities respondents are involved in using descriptive statistics, among respondents engaged in business in the previous 12 months a significantly higher share of beneficiaries were engaged in service sectors, such as tailoring and hairdressing (16 beneficiaries and 2 non-beneficiaries). Other business activities mentioned by respondents included food processing (e.g. making bread and cheese for sale) (1 beneficiary and 5 non-beneficiaries) and craft making (1 beneficiary and 3 non-beneficiaries), both with a statistically significant variation.

When looking at total household per capita income, beneficiaries have Afs 439 more (nearest neighbour matching). The result is robust, as we note from radius matching. Both matching methods produce statistically significant impact at 5% level. While this result is significant, we again see the impact is fairly small (around \$30 more per month).

In conclusion, these findings show that, while the livelihoods training appears to have had a small positive impact on the likelihood of working and on household income, these differences are very small and are based on a small sample size and thus do not demonstrate substantial difference in practice.

Table 12: Summary of key PSM results on livelihoods training (ATT)

Indicators	Nearest neighbour matching					Radius matching				
	Bene	NB	ATT	Sig.	T	Bene	NB	ATT	Sig	T
1. Income (Afs) per person last month	2,154	1,715	439 (214)	**	2.05	2,154	1,750	404 (181)	**	2.23
2. Respondents currently working (%)	2.8	0.0	2.8 (1.3)	**	2.26	2.8	0.6	2.2 (1.4)	*	1.65
3. Respondents engaged in business in past 12 months (%)	9.4	5.6	3.8 (3.2)	NS	1.19	9.4	5.1	4.3 (2.8)	NS	1.55

12 Women’s access to economic opportunities

This section discusses the key barriers to women’s economic activity and income generation in Afghanistan. This research generated perspectives of women on the factors that affect their ability to take advantage of economic opportunities and generate an income.

The survey solicited respondents’ views about factors precluding them from doing business in the previous 12 months. These questions pertained to business in general and not only to tailoring. Half of respondents who did not have a business mentioned gender as one of the key reasons stopping them (Table 13). Not having the right skills was mentioned by 4 of 10 respondents, followed by lack of start-up capital, which was a problem for a quarter of all respondents.

Table 13: Reason for not doing business in previous 12 months

Reason for not doing business	Beneficiary	Non-beneficiary	Total	Mean difference t-test
% not engaged in business in past 12 months	90.1	94.5	92.3	NS
No. of cases	182	182	364	
Business in past 12 months:				
Difficulty in setting up business owing to gender	51.8	49.4	50.6	NS
Don't have right skills	43.3	40.1	41.7	NS
Lack of start-up capital	29.3	20.9	25.0	NS
Others	12.8	14.0	13.4	NS
No. of cases	164	172	336	

Note: * significant at 10%; ** significant at 5%; *** significant at 1%.

As the literature review suggests, gender is a key factor mediating access to employment. It determines access to resources, services and opportunities. In particular, women have limited ability to receive education, acquire skills and access productive resources and assets. Furthermore, traditional norms restrict women’s free movement and ability to take part in employment outside the home. It is important to interpret gender-related restrictions in the context of the overall economic environment in Afghanistan. In particular, it is key to recognise that slow and unequal economic growth and socioeconomic development coupled with the volatile security situation has created serious impediments to establishing labour market opportunities for both men and women. At the same, women tend to face greater restrictions and exclusions than men, as manifested in the overall employment pattern in the study areas.

Table A1.5 in the Annex shows that the rate of male employment in the sample communities was substantially higher than that of female employment. Average male employment is 26 times higher than female employment for non-beneficiaries and 14 times higher for beneficiaries. Female employment is very low. Only 0.05 non-beneficiary women per household on average were in employment and 0.10 women in the beneficiary category. This means five women were employed in every hundred households (This does not include household chores, in which almost all women were engaged).

As shown in the literature review, there is a large difference in the labour force participation of men and women in Afghanistan. The 2007/08 National Risk and Vulnerability Assessment Report (ICON Institute, 2009) divulged patterns of exclusion and vulnerability with a strong gender dimension. The reasons given for these disparities among men and women were a variety of competing demands and barriers for women, such as their care-taking responsibility for children, the elderly and disabled; high fertility; the burden of household chores; low educational attainment; and restricted mobility.

Respondents were asked to identify key factors affecting access to jobs and income in their community. Table A1.6 in the Annex suggests respondents believed education, wealth, landholding and influential positions in the community were the top important factors facilitating access to employment. More than half of all respondents said that being a man increased the chances of accessing a job and earning an income.

These factors – wealth, landholding, education and social status – which represent key pathways to employment tend to favour men over women. In particular, women have little savings and assets, limited access to education and high illiteracy rates, and they are restricted in their social standing and public influence. Traditional social norms restrict female employment outside the home. As a result, women have limited mobility and freedom to take jobs. One respondent reflected on the opportunities men have to receive an education, have freedom of movement and take part in public meetings:

I think yes, there are differences between men and women in our community because men can have jobs, they can get an education, they can go everywhere and all meetings are for men. So these are all the differences between men and women, you know (focus group participant Fr in NB, Kabul).

Male key informants in rural villages of Parwan highlighted structural constraints to women's employment:

We can say obtaining a job is difficult because all our people are poor. They don't have much money to start a job, they are not educated to have a job and there are no opportunities for girls to start a small business or to have a job in our community. Being illiterate is a big problem and all our women are illiterate (key informant M in KKh, Parwan).

I should say it would be easy for women to get a job or start a business. The men allow them, but there are no job opportunities for them because illiteracy rules in our community (key informant M in DB, Parwan).

As shown in Table 13 above, a third of all beneficiary respondents refer to the lack of start-up capital for business as a key impediment to doing business. An NGO helping women start businesses in Afghanistan has estimated the start-up cost of a tailoring business at between Afs 50,000 and 60,000 (\$1,000-1,200).¹⁰ This amount is required to purchase a sewing machine (minimum cost for an electric sewing machine is Afs 20,000), materials for sewing and electricity. Most women in the study communities did not have sufficient resources to invest in an income-generating activity. Inadequate income is conditioned by overall poverty, but, as highlighted in the literature review, women tend to have less control over financial resources than men. The qualitative interviews underscore the importance of accessing the seed capital required to set up a tailoring or any other business:

It is easy for a woman to start a small business in this area if they have money. Without money it is difficult. The important things are money and assets. With money you can do anything (focus group participant Z in AZ, Kabul).

But in order to have a business, first we should have money to start a business. But women have no money to start a business (in-depth interview with L in Pt11-1, Parwan).

In my view, doing this activity is easy. If she has the ability to do that work, and skill, she can be successful. If she doesn't have the ability and place to work, and the most important issue is assets [...] it is very difficult for her to work (in-depth interview with M in MK, Parwan).

¹⁰ Personal communication with Chona Echavez.

If someone wants to work that is easy, but if someone doesn't have the skills and money to start the activity, it would be difficult. Most of the women in this area don't have skills and money (in-depth interview with R in TK, Parwan).

Most women of our community are very poor, they haven't that much money to start their small business, starting a business needs money and skill (focus group participant F4 in KKh, Parwan).

A large share of women in the sample communities were restricted in their ability to work outside the house. Only about a third of all respondents were allowed to work outside. The variation between the proportion of beneficiary and non-beneficiary women allowed to work outside home is not significant (Table 14).

Table 14: Work outside the home by non-beneficiary and beneficiary groups

	Non-beneficiary	Beneficiary	Total	Mean difference t-test
% allowed to work outside home	35.7	29.7	32.7	NS
No. of cases	182	182	364	
Reason for not being allowed to work outside (multiple responses possible)				
Too dangerous	41.9	39.1	40.4	NS
Common norm in Afghanistan	58.1	69.9	59.6.3	NS
No. of cases	117	128	245	

Note: * significant at 10%; ** significant at 5%; *** significant at 1%; NS not significant.

Respondents provided reasons why they were not allowed to work outside the home: 40% pointed to the danger posed to women when they have to work outside the home. More than a quarter (27%) referred to the need for women to be escorted when going out of the home, a factor that restricts their mobility. A fifth of all respondents (20%) said that working outside of the home was not allowed or uncommon in Afghanistan.

The qualitative narratives of almost all respondents convey the restrictions women face when attempting to obtain a job or engage in any income-generating activity. They suggest women often face prejudice and negative attitudes from community members in this regard. This is largely linked to the traditional division of labour in the household, with women responsible for household chores and the man supposed to be the breadwinner and provider for the family:

It's difficult in our community to get a job because if any woman goes out or gets a job people in our community talk badly about her, they say, 'We don't know where she goes' (focus group participant A in FB, Kabul).

Conservative attitudes bar women from jobs. If a woman tries to get a job, her family would say, 'The girls of other families don't go to the office, so why are you are trying to have a job and go to the office?' The gender aspect also affects women getting jobs because men say, 'You are a woman so stay at home and do housework. I am a man, I will do the outside work' (focus group participant H in AZ, Kabul).

I can say it's easy for women to have a job like tailoring in her house but not out of the home because people talk badly about her. Second, we have a bad tradition that women are not allowed to work outside of home. If any woman works outside, she would have a bad reputation in our community. That's why the men don't allow their wives or daughters to work outside. It's the men's idea that men should work for the family and earn money, but women's role is to stay and clean and take care of the house [and] that is enough for them (focus group participant Fr in NB, Kabul).

A male key informant in PM represented the conservative outlook to women's freedom of movement:

He is right, our women are good to be at home. It is our tradition that women never work for an income because it is not a good image for women in our community (key informant G in PM, Parwan).

The ARC trainings were designed to be minimally affected by the restrictions on women's mobility and work outside the home. Beneficiary women were allowed to attend classes as their family members (mostly men) considered them a 'safe space'. In particular, classes were held in the house of a respectable community member trusted by the families of those who attended. Therefore, the women had permission to attend. This did not necessarily mean all those who went were permitted to work outside. Several female respondents said women were allowed to have a business at home, and this represented a good opportunity for women to earn an income:

It is easy to start a business and have an income but this business should be at home, not outside of home, like I have business in my house (focus group participant S in Prt11-1, Parwan).

It is easy for women to start a business and have an income in their homes. At home, it is allowed for women to have a business (in-depth interview with L in Prt11-1, Parwan).

Tailoring is one of the few areas in which women do not need to go outside the home, so they do not require permission to leave the house. Clients can be female, which helps them avoid frequent interaction between females and men. This partly explains the high uptake rate of the Tailoring Module.

A challenge related to home-based business, however, relates to the ability to expand access to the market to maximise income. In particular, selling clothes from home allows for only a limited clientele and income, because it is restricted to social networks known to the tailors. Access to community markets (*bazaars*) can enable women to expand their exposure and earn income. This is difficult, however, because of the restrictions on working outside. Women need the help of male household members to sell clothes at the market. This is how one woman reflected on existing possibilities for women to start a business:

It's easy [to start a business] if they have the ability and someone is there to help them, for example, to sell them in bazaar then it's easy [...] [It is also important to] have assets and also have knowledge (focus group participant F in NB, Kabul).

In summary, this research identified a number of factors affecting women's access to economic opportunities, including restricted access to financial resources and productive assets; and insufficient skills and knowledge as a result of restrictions on girls' education and limited ability to work outside the home, which constrains employment opportunities and access to markets.

13 Women's empowerment

The research also explored whether the livelihoods training empowered women. Measures of empowerment include decision making over household and personal income spending.

The theory of change presented in Section 3 assumes the livelihoods training can benefit women by offering knowledge and skills and enabling them to engage in a business activity and generate income. This in turn can positively affect their ability to have a say in their household's income spending and control their personal income.

The study tested whether engagement in the training enabled women to have greater independence over household income spending. Nearly a third of beneficiaries reported being able to influence household income, but another third did not feel they had any influence. There is a significant variation between the ability of beneficiary and non-beneficiary respondents to influence how household income is spent (Table 15). The data show a higher proportion of beneficiary respondents able to fully influence how their household income is spent compared with non-beneficiary respondents (49 versus 26). At the same time, a statistically significant higher share of non-beneficiaries (69 versus 52) reported not influencing spending decisions.

Table 15: Ability to influence how household income is spent

Able to influence decisions on how household income is spent	Non-beneficiary	Beneficiary	Total	Mean difference t-test
No	37.9	28.6	33.2	***
Yes, fully	14.3	26.9	20.6	***
Yes, to some extent	47.8	44.5	46.2	NS

Note: * significant at 10%; ** significant at 5%; *** significant at 1%.

Includes income from all sources and not only from business

The analysis of quantitative and qualitative data does not render it possible to assert that the livelihoods training was a key contributing factor to these women's involvement in decision making. As discussed earlier, the training enabled only a small group of beneficiaries to engage in business and generate an income. The number of women with labour market involvement is small, and therefore one cannot expect significant empowerment impacts from employment. Furthermore, the number of beneficiaries who reported they could fully influence decisions on household income (27% of 182, or 49 in Table 15) is greater than the number of those who were engaged in business in the previous 12 months (18) (Table 11). While this does not rule out the contribution of the Livelihoods Training, it is clear other factors have played a role in affecting the decision-making ability of these individuals.

The majority of beneficiary respondents in qualitative interviews did not have a say on household income spending: their parents, in particular fathers or husbands, made the decisions on the household budget. A common reason found in both beneficiaries' and non-beneficiaries' narratives was that fathers were the main income earners in the family, providing for the needs of the household, thus anyone needing money would have to ask for it from him. Those who were married would normally ask their husband.

Several respondents reported that they had influence on how household income was spent. Most of these women were 20 years old and above. However, there were three beneficiaries who were below 20, and they claimed they were able to influence how the household income was spent (an 18 year old in TK, Parwan, a 15 year old in AZ, Kabul and a 17 year old in KG, Kabul). It is difficult to attribute their decision-making ability to their engagement in the ARC training, and respondents themselves did not do this. For one thing, it is not clear if beneficiary respondents already had this role in their families before the training. Only one beneficiary explicitly linked her decision-making authority to the training:

My father makes the decisions and I didn't say anything before the training, I did not give any idea. But after the training, because sometimes I have an income, I can give some idea that where should we spend our money (in-depth interview with M in Prt 11-1, Parwan).

The research explored whether income-earning ability enabled women more control over their personal money. The data reveal that the majority of the respondents who earned an income (25 of 28 beneficiaries, 89%, and 7 of 10 non-beneficiaries, 7%) were able to influence decisions on how their personal income was spent (Table 16). One of twenty-eight beneficiaries (4%) and one of ten non-beneficiaries (10%) were unable to influence decisions about the income they earned. The variation between the two groups is not significant, possibly owing to the small sample size.

Table 16: Ability to influence decisions on how personal income is spent

Ability to influence decisions on how personal income is spent	Non-beneficiary	Beneficiary	Total	Mean difference t-test
No	10.0	3.6	5.3	NS
Yes, fully	70.0	89.3	84.2	NS
Yes, to some extent	20.0	7.1	10.5	NS
No. of cases	10	28	38	

Note: * significant at 10%; ** significant at 5%; *** significant at 1%.

The qualitative data show some beneficiary respondents who earned their own income were able to spend this on their needs as they wished:

If sometimes I have any income from my tailoring, I can also spend that for myself (in-depth interview with N in DB, Parwan).

I have my own income and I can spend that anywhere I want (in-depth interview with M in NB, Kabul).

Yes, the training was very helpful for me, I learned tailoring; now I can sew my clothes and my family's clothes, and for other women I also make clothes and take money from them. I have a good income from tailoring, before I was taking money from my husband, but now I am independent. I have money and I can spend that anywhere (in-depth interview with M in NB, Kabul).

I can make clothes for other people and for me and I have some income from this, for the basic things I need I can buy them with my income (focus group participant F5 in FB, Kabul).

It is not possible to conclude whether the livelihoods training was the main contributor to greater independence for respondents who reported having full autonomy over personal income spending.

To conclude, nearly a third of beneficiaries reported being able to influence household income, with a significantly higher proportion of beneficiaries able to fully influence spending compared with non-beneficiary respondents. Analysis of the data, however, does not allow for establishing a causal link between greater decision-making authority over household income and the livelihoods training. The majority of respondents who earned an income were able to influence decisions on how their personal income was spent, but the variation between beneficiaries and non-beneficiary is not significant.

14 Social relations and interaction with authorities

The research hypothesised that the life skills education training and the livelihoods training were likely to affect beneficiaries' relationships with their family members and community residents. Table 17 shows that 74% of beneficiary respondents said their participation in the trainings affected their relationship with family members. In total, 72% of these respondents reported being treated with more respect; 28% were experiencing more tension in their relationships within the family.

A total of 56% of beneficiary respondents said participation in ARC training had affected their relationships with other community residents. Among these, 63% reported being treated with more respect but 35% said participation in the ARC had resulted in more tensions in such relationships.

Table 17: Relationships with family and community members

	%	No
Relationships with family members affected by ARC (% of 182)	73.6	134
Specific effects of ARC on relationships with family members (% of 134)		
Treated with more respect	71.6	96
More tensions in our relationship	28.4	38
ARC affected relationships with other people (% of 182)	56.0	102
Specific effects of ARC on relationships with other people (% of 102)		
Treated with more respect	62.7	64
More tensions in our relationship	35.3	36
Have more friends	1.0	1
Meet with friends often	1.0	1

The qualitative interviews confirm that the two trainings contributed to greater respect and appreciation by other family members. Many beneficiaries gained respect from their family members and could now share their opinions on some other things. Many said they were now listened to and appreciated within the household:

Yes, they are paying more attention to me than in the past and also they have more respect for me now. Before the ARC course, if I was giving any information to my family members, they were not listening to me. They were saying that I don't know anything so how would they know that what I was saying was right. But after participating in the ARC course, whatever information I am giving them, they are listening to me and saying it is the advantage of ARC course that I learned many thing and is sharing it with them (in-depth interview with F1 in FB, Kabul).

Yes, they are encouraging me to learn and get an education and they are respecting me more than the past. Now, since I have been educated my family asks me to give some ideas if they want to do something. It was not like this before the training (in-depth interview with R in NB, Kabul).

Yes, my participation in the training brought changes in family relationships. All respect me a lot, family pay attention to my words, my brother and sister accept my words and both of them respect me more than before. And people don't have any prejudice with me (in-depth interview with H in AZ, Kabul).

Some beneficiaries referred to changes in relationships with community members. For example, a 14 year old in AZ described how the values taught at the ARC training influenced her thinking and relations with her neighbours.

Yes, it brought many changes [...] Now, people respect me a lot and I also respect them. We respect each other. Whenever I go outside the home, my neighbours greet me [...] Before the course we were fighting even on small issues with my neighbours and we did not have good relationships with the children of our neighbours. When we went to the courses our teacher told us we should have good behaviour with the neighbours and we should respect elderly people and children and we should treat them like our own family. The teacher told us if your neighbour gets angry with you then Allah also will be angry you. Therefore I will not have bad behaviour with them and I will respect them (in-depth interview with N in AZ, Kabul).

An 18 year old in TK noted that she was able to use her tailoring skills to teach other girls:

Yes, these ARC courses have made me become more confident than in the past because now I have this confidence to train other girls. And now I am teaching other women in my community [...] Now I teach my cousins tailoring and they are so happy now. And now we are so close and friendly with each other (in-depth interview with F in TK, Parwan).

Several respondents in the qualitative assessment mentioned that, despite the positive contribution of the training, they had experienced jealousy from other community members. Some non-beneficiaries who had wanted to attend the courses offered by ARC were not selected and were envious of the chances given to the beneficiaries. At times, non-beneficiaries and their family members made negative remarks to those who had attended the training. In addition, some conservative community members made negative remarks about the content of the courses, especially such topics as women’s rights and VAW:

Yes, after attending ARC courses I feel many changes in my relationships [with other women]; now women from our community bring their dresses for me to sew. Before, they never come in our home, but now we have good relations with each other but there are some girls that are jealous of me, they always talks badly about me (focus group participant Y in Pt11-1, Parwan).

Yes, the ARC training brought changes in our relations because when I attended ARC courses at that time our neighbours were jealous of me. They told other girls that my tailoring and bead embroidery were not good [...] but some of our neighbours have good relations with my family and they bring their dresses for me to make (focus group participant Q in Pt11-1, Parwan).

Yes, the ARC courses brought changes in my relationships [with other girls] because now there are some girls in our community who are jealous of me, but I don’t care as there are some girls who appreciate me [and what I do] and they are my best friends (focus group participant F in Pt11-1, Parwan).

The second hypothesis is that participation in the training is likely to increase the social network of the participants. According to 84.1% of beneficiary respondents (153 of 182), their circle of friends and acquaintances increased as a result of the ARC training.

Table 18: ARC participation and membership in groups among beneficiaries

Circle of friends and acquaintances changed as a result of the ARC training?	%	No.
Increased	84.1	153
Stayed the same	15.4	28
Decreased	0.5	1

The qualitative data indicate that beneficiary respondents enlarged the circle of friends and acquaintances and intensified their social interaction after attending the training courses:

Before the training I didn't know my neighbours but when I participated in this course I knew my neighbours and now we have a good relationship with each other (focus group participant R in DA, Kabul).

The ARC brought changes in my relationships because now we have good relations with the people of our community. I have more friends than in the past [...] Before the ARC courses we were strangers to each other; now we are friends (focus group participant M in Prt11-1, Parwan).

Yes, it brought lots of changes. Before the training, I did not know most of the girls. When they came in this course, we became friends with each other and now we go to each other's house (in-depth interview with R in TK, Parwan).

Finally, the research hypothesised that the training could promote girls' interaction with authorities. The data show, however, that women in the study areas had almost no interaction with local authorities. Very few respondents, both non-beneficiary and beneficiary, had appealed in the previous two years to the local authorities to find a solution to a problem (Table 19) (only 4%). The overwhelming majority of all respondents said they did not have a problem to refer to the local authorities. Some 8% of beneficiaries and 7% of non-beneficiaries believed women were not supposed to interact with the authorities.

Table 19: Interaction with authorities by non-beneficiaries and beneficiaries

	Non-beneficiaries	Beneficiaries	Total	Mean difference t-test
Appealed to local authorities to solve a problem in past two years				
No	97.8	95.1	96.4	NS
Yes	2.2	4.9	3.6	NS
No. of cases	182	182	364	
How problem was dealt with (multiple responses possible)				
Local authorities considered problem but could not solve it	25.0	0.0	7.7	
Local authorities considered problem and solved it	75.0	88.9	84.6	
Local authorities ignored it	0.0	11.1	7.7	
No. of cases	4	9	13	
Reason for not appealing (multiple responses possible)				
Women not supposed to/not good for women to do so	7.3	8.1	7.7	NS
They wouldn't help anyway because they're not willing	0.0	1.2	0.6	NS
It is difficult to get access to government officials	0.6	1.7	1.1	NS
There was no problem	91.6	87.9	89.7	NS
Not allowed/no permission	1.1	1.7	1.4	NS
I was too young	0.6	0.6	0.6	NS
No. of cases	178	173	351	

Note: * significant at 10%; ** significant at 5%; *** significant at 1%.

For the majority of the beneficiary respondents (65%), participation in the training did not influence willingness to appeal to local authorities to solve a problem (Table 20). At the same time, nearly a third of all beneficiaries said they were encouraged by the ARC training to appeal to local authorities to solve a problem. This, however, did not translate into willingness and ability to communicate with local authorities in practice. In the context of existing gender roles and social hierarchies in local communities in Afghanistan, interaction with authorities is perceived to be the task of older household members and particularly men.

Table 20: Appealing to local authorities

	%	No.
Participation in ARC training influenced your willingness to appeal to local authorities to solve a problem?		
No	64.8	118
Yes	35.3	64
No. of cases	182	
How has the ARC training encouraged you to appeal to local authorities to solve a problem?		
Our facilitator encouraged us	71.9	46
Our training participants encouraged me	12.5	8
The training made me aware of my rights	18.8	12
The training made me more confident	10.9	7
No. of cases	64	

To sum up, the ARC training had a mostly positive effect on social relations, including with family and community members. It contributed to greater respect and appreciation by other family and community members and increased the social networks and social interaction of beneficiaries. At the same time, some respondents reported increased tension and negative attitudes in their communities. The data show their participation in the training did not promote their interaction with authorities and that women in the study areas had no interaction with local authorities.

15 Conclusions

This ODI–AREU research examined the effects of BRAC’s life skills education training and livelihoods training conducted in Kabul and Parwan provinces in 2011. Below is the summary of the main findings, followed by a discussion of the key factors explaining the outcomes of the interventions.

Only a small share of all beneficiaries (13%, or 23 of 182) reported being able to utilise their skills to start a business. Qualitative interviews confirmed this, showing some 19 participants of the livelihoods training able to engage in business and earn an income. The results of the PSM analysis suggest that, while the livelihoods training appears to have had a small positive impact on the likelihood of working and on household income, these differences are very small and do not demonstrate substantial differences in practice.

A key factor contributing to the limited income-generating outcomes of the livelihoods training relates to the design and delivery of the training. Respondents who did not engage in tailoring considered insufficient skills to be the primary reason for not being able to undertake income-generating activities after the training. Those who were engaged in business appeared to have a basic level of knowledge of tailoring before the course was introduced; the training enabled them to strengthen their skills and become proficient. Those who started the course without prior knowledge were not able to learn sufficient skills to make clothes for money. Beneficiary perceptions generated by the quantitative survey attest to the fact that the livelihoods training was not effective in fostering adequate skills. Some 43% of survey beneficiary respondents referred to lack of skills as one of the key reasons for not engaging in business in the previous 12 months. Owing to its home-based nature, the outcomes of the training were not affected by major constraints to female employment such as restricted mobility.

In terms of empowerment effects, nearly a third of beneficiaries of both types of training reported being able to influence household income, with a significantly higher proportion of beneficiaries able to fully influence such spending compared with non-beneficiary respondents. Analysis of the data, however, does not allow for establishing a causal link between greater decision-making authority over household income and the livelihoods training. The majority of respondents who earned an income were able to influence decisions on how their personal income was spent, but the variation between beneficiaries and non-beneficiary is not significant.

Both types of training had a mostly positive effect on social relations, with both family and community members. They contributed to greater respect and appreciation from other family members and the community and increased the social networks and social interaction of beneficiaries. At the same time, some respondents reported increased tension and negative attitudes in their communities. In some cases, this was thought to be driven by jealousy of those girls who were ineligible to enrol in the course, and in others by conservative attitudes of community members, who disapproved of the course content. Evidence shows that participation in the trainings did not promote interaction with authorities; women in the study areas had no interaction with local authorities.

More generally, young women saw limited access to education, lower social status and restrictions on female mobility as the key barriers to female employment. Gender appears to be a key factor mediating access to the labour market, determining access to resources, services and opportunities in Afghanistan. In particular, women have limited ability to receive education, acquire skills and access productive resources and assets. Furthermore, traditional norms restrict women’s ability to take part in employment outside the home.

These findings have an important policy implication. In order to promote inclusion and empowerment, development interventions must acknowledge the complexity of social change and exclusion and address the drivers of existing multiple deprivations (Babajanian and Hagen-Zanker, 2012). In order to promote access to jobs and income, skills development interventions must not only deliver effective teaching and learning outcomes, but also tackle social, economic and institutional factors that result in unequal access and exclusion. This involves identifying and recognising drivers of exclusion, and supporting institutional arrangements and macro-level policies to address them.

These drivers will be different depending on the specific sectoral area. For instance, tailoring appears to be a feasible choice, as it is culturally acceptable and does not require women to work outside home. To be successful, however, it requires access to capital to purchase sewing machines, fabric and other necessary materials. Expanding tailoring will further necessitate the ability to sell clothes at markets (*bazaars*), which are typically dominated by men. This can be difficult, as women often face restrictions on working outside the home and may not be able to secure the support of a male relative who is available to accompany them or to sell merchandise on their behalf.

16 Policy recommendations

Based on the lessons learned from the BRAC programme, this section concludes with a set of recommendations for promoting gender-sensitive programmes around women's economic empowerment, skills, training and literacy in Afghanistan and similar contexts. These recommendations are split into two themes: programme design and delivery; and addressing gender inequalities.

16.1 Programme design and delivery

Enhance teaching and learning outcomes. As this research shows, the content and delivery of the livelihoods training were not appropriate for enabling effective employment generation outcomes. Our evidence further strengthens the importance of designing programmes more carefully. For instance, this includes establishing mechanisms for quality control in order to maximise teaching and learning outcomes for marginalised groups. It also entails incorporating institutional arrangements for monitoring and evaluation so as to draw lessons for informing forthcoming programmes.

Focus on marketable skills. As highlighted in the literature review, courses in tailoring and embroidery tend to be oversubscribed across the country and do not offer viable employment options to trainees (Solotaroff et al. 2009). Our research did not generate specific evidence about marketability of tailoring. Yet the appropriateness of offering tailoring and embroidery in BRAC's programme seems questionable considering the existing knowledge about limited market outlets and employment prospects in this area.

An important factor for promoting productive employment is identifying the types of skills and sectoral areas in which excluded individuals can successfully generate an income. The World Bank (2012) suggests policymakers need 'a better understanding of how different types of skills (technical, cognitive, and noncognitive) affect labor market outcomes, and then developing systems that are able to transfer the necessary skills to current and future workers' (p.41). It is crucial to conduct market and economic studies to determine the economic prospects and practical feasibility of different sets of skills.

Facilitate access to resources and markets. A key priority that comes out strongly from this research is the need to address specific constraints to income-generating activities such as the lack of resources and limited access to markets. The ARC programme did not incorporate institutional arrangements to facilitate access to start-up capital, productive assets and markets.

Training interventions can be combined with income-generating opportunities that can offer small amounts of cash and/or in-kind support to allow initial investments to excluded groups. This includes, for example, additional support such as loans or grants to women after completion of training in order to help them find work or traineeships, or to register and develop their own businesses (Echavez, 2012). Access to finance and essential inputs can be promoted through linkages with existing income-generating schemes. Simultaneously, it is critical to offer support access to markets and develop mechanism and strategies for marketing products.

Asset transfer livelihoods programmes can also be successful in enabling women to undertake productive activities in rural areas. In a country where 77% of the population is engaged in agriculture-related activities and 55% work solely in agriculture, one cannot neglect this sector's economic potential (Ganesh et al., 2013: 38).

The case study of the Chars Livelihood Programme in Bangladesh (conducted under this research project) shows that this programme's integrated approach, combining asset transfer with income support and social training, generated positive outcomes for women (Siddiki et al 2014). In particular, it enabled livelihood diversification and seasonal consumption smoothing as well as enhanced women's access to credit. The programme operated in a conservative environment similar to that in Afghanistan and supported women's skills and economic opportunities within culturally acceptable boundaries (e.g. activities they can do within their homestead).

16.2 Addressing gender inequalities

Enhance women's labour market options. Skills training such as BRAC's intervention is important as it is designed to meet women's practical needs. However, it concentrates on traditional female sectors and does not intend to challenge existing social and gender relations in the labour market in Afghanistan. The Tailoring Module of BRAC's livelihoods training was more successful than other modules in ensuring take-up mainly because it did not require females to seek authorisation to work outside the home (and did not incur expenses for hiring business premises). A report by Echavez (2012) found that families were more accepting of women working in health and education compared with other employment sectors. Taking into account the existing gendered division of roles and conservative patriarchal norms is important as it can help ensure programmes are feasible and practical.

Moser (1989) makes a distinction between women's practical needs and strategic interests. Practical needs stem from the necessity to address issues of immediate sustenance and strategic interests refer to the need to tackle existing inequalities in gender relations. BRAC's training has been designed to deal with women's practical needs, but it is important also to develop interventions that can help shift women's positions. Thus, programmes can challenge the gendered division of labour by offering training in the sectors outside traditional women's work, which may be poorly remunerated and may devalue women's contribution. For example, as this study shows, a third of all women in the studied communities reported that they had the freedom to work outside the house. This opens up an opportunity to implement targeted interventions to support their engagement outside traditional female work areas and in occupations that are non-home-based.

Conduct social and institutional research and analysis. As this research highlights, in order to promote access to jobs and income for women, it is important to tackle social, economic and institutional factors that result in social exclusion. This involves understanding increasingly complex, contextualised and nuanced facets of social exclusion, gender relations and (economic) empowerment. This can be done by supporting research into the needs, aspirations and constraints of women from different communities, ages and ethnicities in designing and planning initiatives. For instance, this includes research evaluating the gendered structure of the economy and labour market that can inform the design of labour programmes. This can help in identifying and recognising existing structural constraints to female exclusion and supporting arrangements and policies that can address them.

Arutyunova and Clark (2013) offer some apt reflections:

What is crucial [...] is [...] to look at interventions through the lens of human rights, women's rights, and most importantly, what women's rights organizations have learnt about the structural roots of gender power that continue to subordinate, marginalize, or exclude women and girls. [Donors] must begin to embrace an analysis of the deeply embedded socio-cultural factors that shape norms and expectations of women and girls, and how these limit their ability to use and benefit from the training or resources provided by such projects in the longer run (p.45).

It is important to adopt an approach that recognises that pathways to economic empowerment will look quite different for women of different social classes, ethnicities, geographic locations, abilities and ages. A nuanced and in-depth understanding of social and gender relations can help reveal outlets and opportunities for donor support and mobilisation.

Promote visible change. A key factor that can affect empowerment is the length and scale of women's income-earning ability. In particular, it is likely that women's ability to have a say in household spending depends on whether their earning ability is sustained over time as well as on the amount of income they earn. The beneficiary respondents in this research did not earn sufficient income and men were the major breadwinners in their families. A study on women's empowerment in Afghanistan concludes that, 'changes in attitude are clearer in projects that brought visible income generation or enhancement' (Ganesh et al., 2013: 2).

Mobilise support of women and men. Addressing existing gender inequalities requires dedication, consistency and time and must foremost be driven by Afghan women themselves. Women's rights organisations and movements nationally (e.g. the Afghan Women's Network) regionally and internationally are natural strategic partners for any funders working in the areas of young women's economic empowerment (Arutyunova and Clark, 2013).

Gender inequalities cannot be addressed without encouraging men to support women's roles and position in the society. Barakat (2008) suggests that one step in realising this is to demonstrate the practical and tangible benefits of involving women in community decision making and public life. This can help enhance men's understanding and appreciation of women's involvement. Focusing on evident positive impacts can help solicit the 'buy-in' of male stakeholders and offer 'opportunities for modest, but genuine progress in altering the "rules of the game"' (p.48).

Support broader policy changes. There must be longer-term community engagement, programming and support for women for them to be able to take advantage of economic opportunities. Provision of training and safe spaces is only the first step in supporting women to participate in the labour market. Social protection and labour interventions – even if well designed – have a limited sectoral remit and may not tackle all broader contextual issues that foster exclusion. Specific micro-level initiatives must be supported in parallel with broader policy initiatives and sectoral reforms. Thus, policies to support girls and women's access to education and other services are crucial. Women's capabilities in Afghanistan are severely restricted by the weak provision of public services and rights by the state (Kandiyoti, 2007). It is important to strengthen the capacity of public institutions to provide education, health and the rule of law. Policy efforts at the macroeconomic level must address gendered barriers in the labour market, especially women's ability to access productive assets and credit and register businesses.

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Appendix: Additional tables

Table A1.1: Were there expenses associated with joining the ARC programme?

	No. of cases	Value
Had to spend money to apply to the programme (% of 182)	9	4.9
Reason for payment (multiple responses possible) (% of 9 cases)		
Transport	2	22.2
Paperwork	5	55.6
Petrol	1	11.1
Materials (e.g. scissors etc.)	3	33.3
Average amount spent (Afs, based on who paid)	9	385.56
Experienced other inconveniences (% of 182)	2	1.1
Inconvenience experienced (multiple responses possible) (% of 2 cases)		
Queuing and waiting	2	100.0
Negative attitude of civil servants	1	50.0

Table A1.2: Household characteristics by beneficiary household

Household characteristics	Non-beneficiary		Beneficiary		Absolute difference	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Dif. in mean	t-statistics
Family size (no.)	8.23	2.76	8.47	2.93	0.24	0.79
Male members (no.)	3.75	1.76	3.81	1.82	0.07	0.35
Female members (no.)	4.48	1.81	4.65	1.93	0.17	0.87
Ethnic group Pashtun=1	0.060	0.239	0.066	0.249	0.005	0.22
Ethnic group Tajik=1	0.923	0.267	0.929	0.258	0.005	0.20
Religion Sunni Muslim=1	0.962	0.193	0.989	0.105	0.027	1.69*
Landless=1	0.802	0.399	0.784	0.412	0.018	0.41
Income (Afs) per person last month	1790.8	1401.0	2160.0	2075.2	369.12	1.97**
Male no. completed primary education	0.176	0.448	0.209	0.459	0.03	0.69
Female no. completed primary education	0.203	0.501	0.275	0.537	0.07	1.31
Male no. completed secondary education	0.170	0.419	0.159	0.448	0.01	0.24
Female no. completed secondary education	0.093	0.292	0.104	0.307	0.01	0.35

Note: * significant at 10%; ** significant at 5%; *** significant at 1%.

Table A1.3: Household head of respondents, by occupation category and province

	Kabul		Parwan		Total	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Farming	11	6.88	8	4.91	19	5.88
Trade and related work	52	32.5	50	30.67	102	31.58
Plant and machine operators and assemblers	20	12.50	29	17.79	49	15.17
Labourers and unskilled workers	45	28.13	37	22.70	82	25.39
Others	32	20.00	39	23.93	71	21.98
Total	160	100	163	100	323	100

Table A1.4: Modules taken in the Livelihood Training (multiple responses possible)

	No.	% of 182
Embroidery	35	19.2
Tailoring	150	82.4
Bag making	10	5.5
Carpet making	1	0.5
Food processing	1	0.5
Small livestock	19	10.4

Annex A1.5: Employment by gender

	Non-beneficiary	Beneficiary	Mean all	t value for mean difference
Male employment (no./household)	1.32	1.40	1.36	0.84 NS
Female employment (no./household)	0.05	0.10	0.08	1.37 NS
% of respondents allowed to work outside home	35.7	29.7	32.7	1.23 NS
No. of cases	182	182	364	

Note: * significant at 10%; ** significant at 5%; *** significant at 1%; NS not significant at 10%.

Table A1.6: Important factors in community to obtain access to a job and earn an income, non-beneficiary and beneficiary groups

	Total
a. Higher education	89.4 (n=360)
b. Wealth/material possessions	81.1 (n=359)
c. Landholdings	69.5 (n=357)
d. Influential position in community (please specify)	69.5 (n=352)
e. Men	53.5 (n=357)
f. Middle-aged people	51.0 (n=357)
g. Old inhabitants	51.2 (n=344)
h. Political party affiliation	48.6 (n=319)
i. People of dominant ethnic group	55.3 (n=318)

Note: * significant at 10%; ** significant at 5%; *** significant at 1%.



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