



# Gender implications for social safety nets in Afghanistan

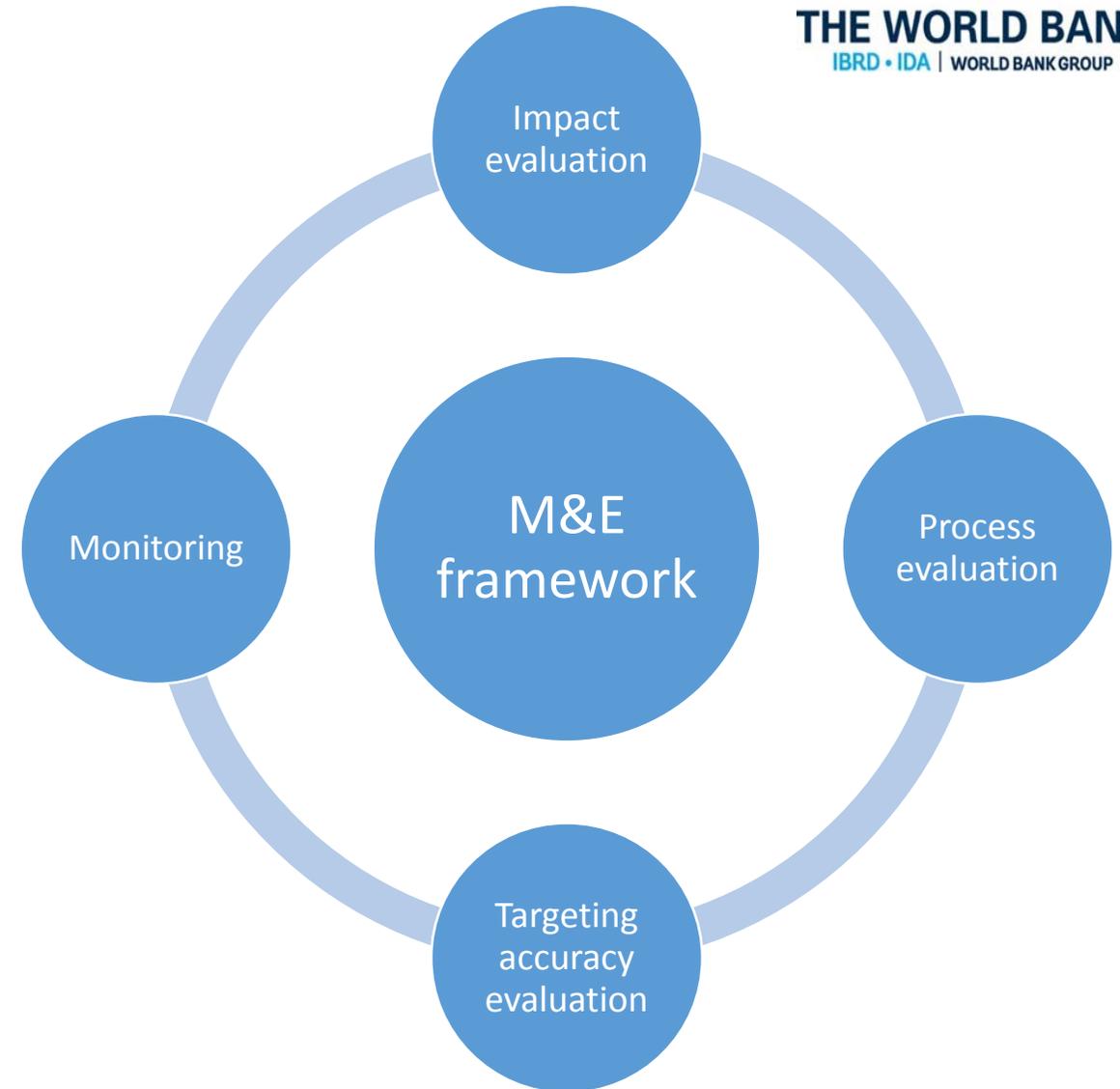
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June 2, 2016



# Objectives of this rapid gender assessment

To inform the design and delivery of social safety nets in Afghanistan through identification of:

- **constraints** to women's ability to access social safety net programs as direct beneficiaries
- **opportunities** to overcome constraints
- **implications and risks** of women or men directly receiving income transfers through a social safety net program
- **contribute to broader M&E framework** of safety net pilot



# Focus group discussions

Female FGDs were designed to gain an understanding of women’s activities and responsibilities, and to grasp the dynamics of household spending and general decision-making from their perspective.

Male FGDS were designed to elucidate the perceptions of male community members on challenges faced by households and household decision-making processes

Community Elder FGDs were conducted with community leaders including *Maliks* (local leaders), *Wakils*, and members of the *Shura/CDC*. These discussions focused on community profiles, potential constraints regarding women’s access to a potential safety net as well as previous assistance provided to the community.

Location	FGD with female potential beneficiaries	FGD with male community members	KII with local authority figures
Bamyan – Yakawlang	7	4	4
Kunar – Khas Kunar	7	4	4
Kunar – Nurgal	7	4	4
<b>Total</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>12</b>



FGD with Community Elders in Khas Kunar

# Background: Afghanistan's severe vulnerability context

Top 3 shocks per region

Water (51%)  
Prices (46%)  
Agricultural (31%)

Prices (71%)  
Natural hazards (66%)  
Water (65%)

Natural hazards (92%)  
Agricultural (80%)  
Water (72%)

Prices (66%)  
Water (56%)  
Agricultural (47%)

Prices (58%)  
Water (54%)  
Natural hazards (35%)

Prices (72%)  
Water (36%)  
Natural hazards (33%)

Prices (31%)  
Natural hazards (13%)  
Agricultural (12%)

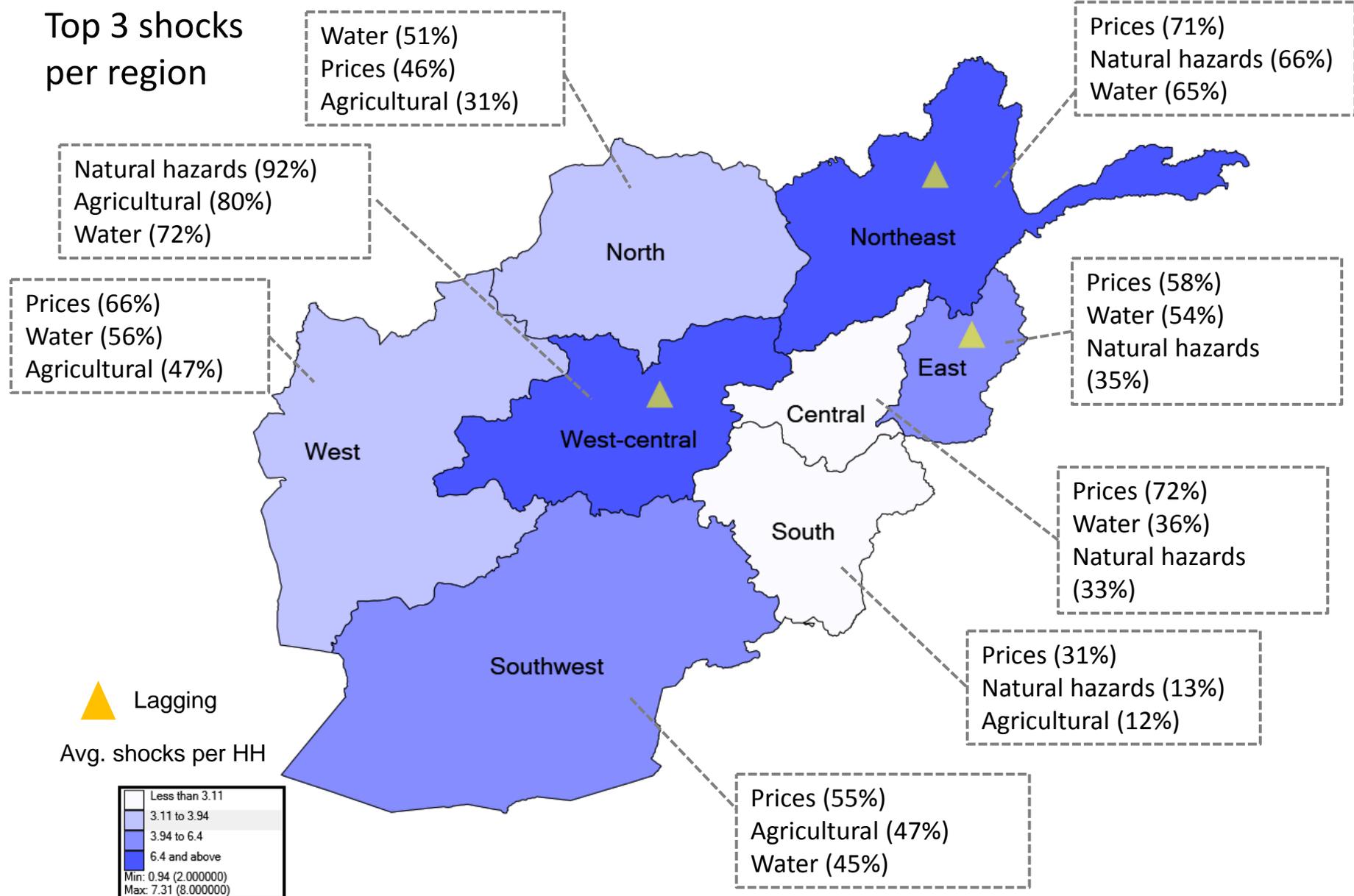
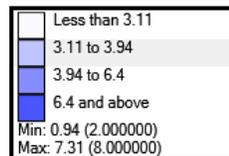
Prices (55%)  
Agricultural (47%)  
Water (45%)

In 2011/12

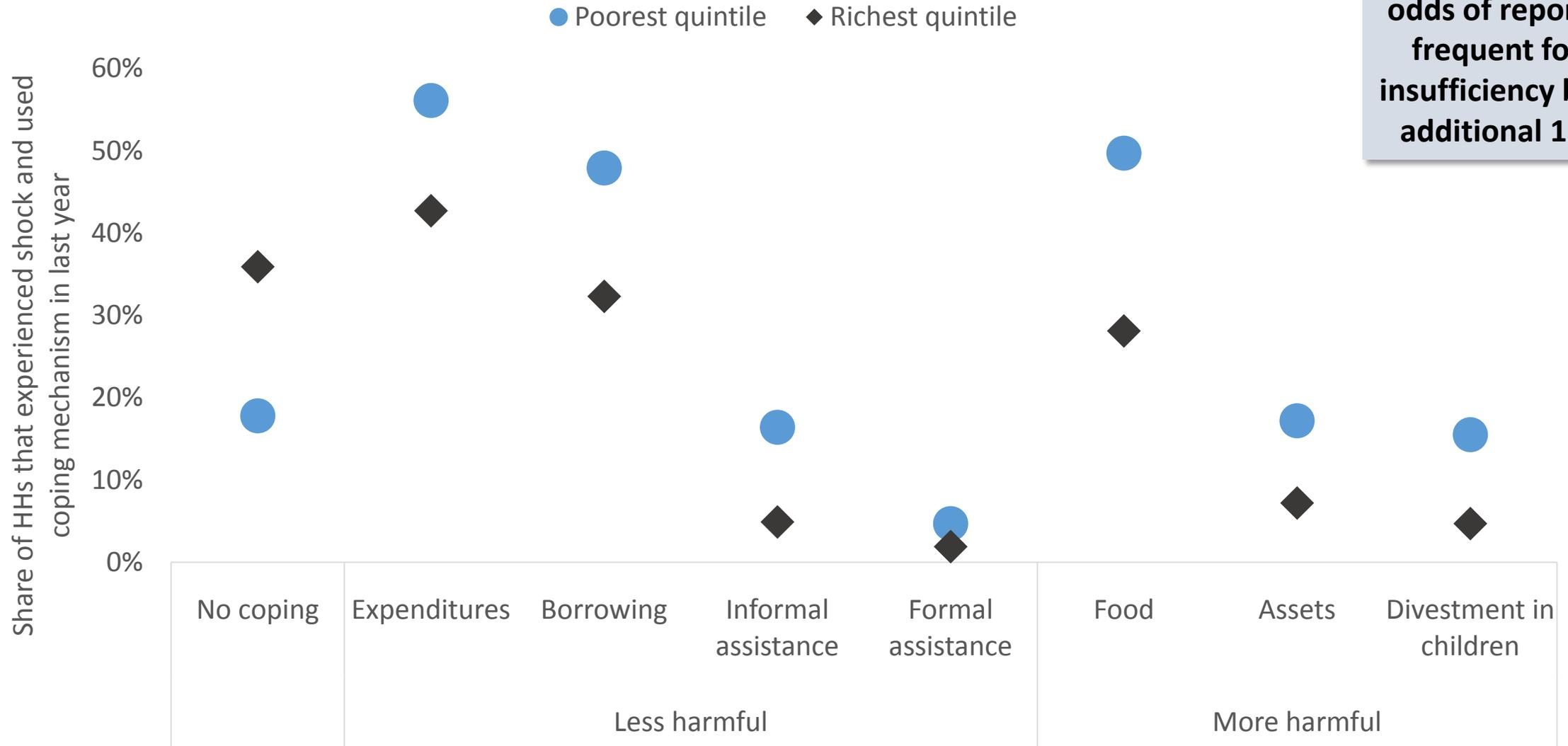
- 84% of households experienced 1+ shock
- 53% faced 3+ shocks

▲ Lagging

Avg. shocks per HH



# The poorest draw more on harmful coping mechanisms



Every 1 shock reported increased a household's odds of reporting frequent food insufficiency by an additional 11%.

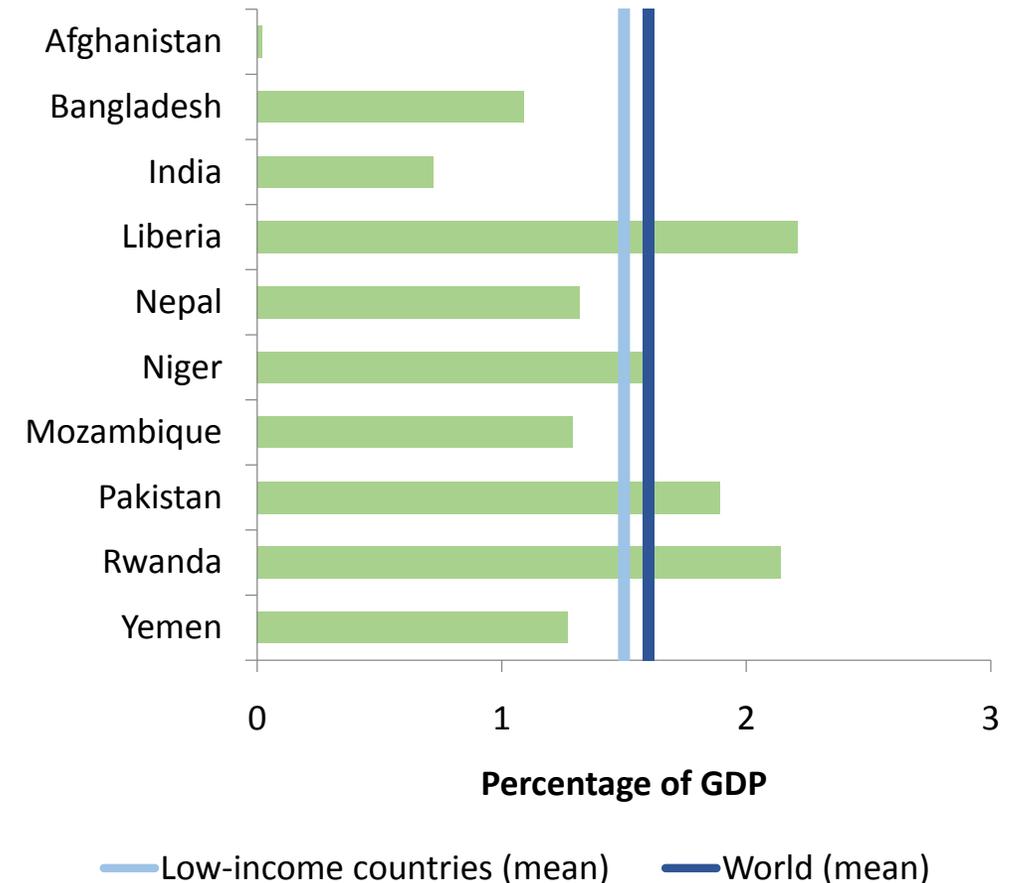


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# Afghanistan Safety Nets Pilot

- Overall project objective to develop *systems* for scalable social protection (e.g., targeting, payments, grievances, management)
- Safety net objective is to smooth food consumption and reduce harmful coping among very poor families with children under 5
- Annual benefit = approx. 125 USD per family over two payments
- Poverty-targeting involving community mobilization and proxy means testing (poverty scorecard)
- Pilot in 5 districts with approx. 10,000 families

Public spending on safety nets is extremely low & programs are mainly fragmented and off-budget



Source: World Bank, *The State of Social Safety Nets 2015*.



# Why cash transfers for the Afghan context?

- Ample int'l evidence from large-scale cash transfer programs showing effectiveness for increasing food security (Transfer Project 2016)
- Less costly and administratively intensive than major policy alternatives, such as public works, vouchers, or in-kind transfers
- Potential for minimizing leakage through technology-based payments
- Potential for positive 'spillovers' – e.g., increasing aggregate demand, human capital outcomes, and benefits to ineligible households through informal gifts and transfers

# What do we know about women as recipients? - int'l experience

## Promising because...

- Evidence based on household consumption and spending studies suggests that women spend more of their income on food for household and children's health and education
- Transfers to women might increase intra-household bargaining power and increase empowerment – even reduce partner violence (e.g., Mexico, Peru, Kenya)
- *Mechanisms* used to implement cash transfers can also empower women— e.g., extending bank accounts (Kenya) or ID cards (Pakistan)

## But...

- Little *direct* evidence that female vs male cash transfer beneficiary arrangements result in different household benefits (Yoong et al 2012)
- Limited research on the effects of cash transfers on women's empowerment (Kabeer et al 2012)
- Conditions could reinforce gender stereotypes (e.g., Ecuador qualitative research)
- Income spikes can threaten patriarchies and put some women at risk (e.g., Ecuador – women with less than primary ed.; Mexico – women whose husbands hold more traditional gender views)
- Social-cultural constraints to women's access could reduce reach of social safety nets if too strict



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# Direct transfers to female beneficiaries: expected outcomes and challenges

## Currently

- Women have very little influence on household spending decisions overall, but there is variability
- While many women could not make direct purchases, some influenced spending through creating lists and asking male relatives to make specific purchases

Mixed views on implications of transfers to women but they broadly groups under three categories:

- It would make no difference whether payments went to men or women
- Women would gain influence—at least having greater say in what men purchased
- Women could be put at risk—especially if they tried to assert control over income against men's preferences



**Even for food purchases, in 89% of households, women say the decisions are made mainly by men (NRVA 2007/8).**

*If I received 2,000 Afghanis, I would spend the money on necessary food items such as rice, flour, ghee, and so on. If there is some money left, I will spend it on items the children need. My husband would spend it on the same things. – Female FGD*



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# Risks & opportunities

## Risks

*I am the only one to decide what to buy, how much to buy, and how much to spend. We never face disagreement on this issue. The reason why men in this area are buying the food is that women are not familiar with the market. Women cannot go to the district centre and buy the food. – Male FGD*

*If there is disagreement over how money should be spent, I'll beat her up until she reforms and doesn't do anything on her own. – Male FGD*

*If money is given to my husband, he might spend a third on household items and the rest of the money he will use for phone cards, cigarettes, or snuff. It would be better if we receive the money secretly, so our husbands do not know. – Female FGD*

## Opportunities

*It is true that women can't go to the bazar, but if we had our own money, we could tell our husbands what to buy or not to buy and they would accept. – Female FGD*

*I think if the money were paid to my husband, he would spend it on items for himself and phone cards. If it were paid to me, I would spend it on my children and food items for home. Mothers are more concerned about the home than fathers. Women are also thrifty. – Female FGD*

# Challenges: Mobility constraints

## GOING ANYWHERE IS HARD

*If a chaperone accompanies them, women could go from Jalalabad to Kabul to receive their money. If a chaperone does not accompany her, she cannot even travel 100 meters. She cannot even leave the house. So I don't think this is going to work. It would really be much easier if men received the money.*

*FGD Women Khas Kunar*

**Security** was a prevalent issue in all discussions of well-being among the target population, as evinced by the frequency of security-related terms occurring during the course of focus group discussions conducted over the course of the study.

## GOING FAR IS HARDER

*The centre of Yakawlang is 3 hours away from here. The women would have to go there on foot. This is not possible.*

*FGD Elders Yakawlang*

*A better method is to have the registration site nearby. Women could go with all their friends and receive money.*

*FGD Elders Khas Kunar*

## GOING ANYWHERE IN UNSAFE PLACES IS CLOSE TO IMPOSSIBLE

*Women can go to the registration centres if they operate in secure locations – it doesn't matter if it is near or far. Although, if it is far, women will need to be accompanied by their chaperone. If the security situation is bad, they may run into problems having to do with security because the Taliban do not allow women to go to the clinic or school without a chaperone. So how can one expect them to allow women to go to the registration centres?*

*FGD Men Nurgal*



## Challenges: Time constraints

- The mothers of young children often do not have the possibility to leave their homes for an extended period of time, even in the presence of a chaperone.
- Women stated not having the time to go through the procedures required to access the cash transfer.

*I can go to the centre without any problem, but I have lots of duties at home. I need to take care of my children. If I go to the centre, I cannot fulfil my duties in an appropriate manner. (...) As you know, women have household duties, taking care of livestock, working on the land and taking care of our children.*

Female FGD, Yakawlang





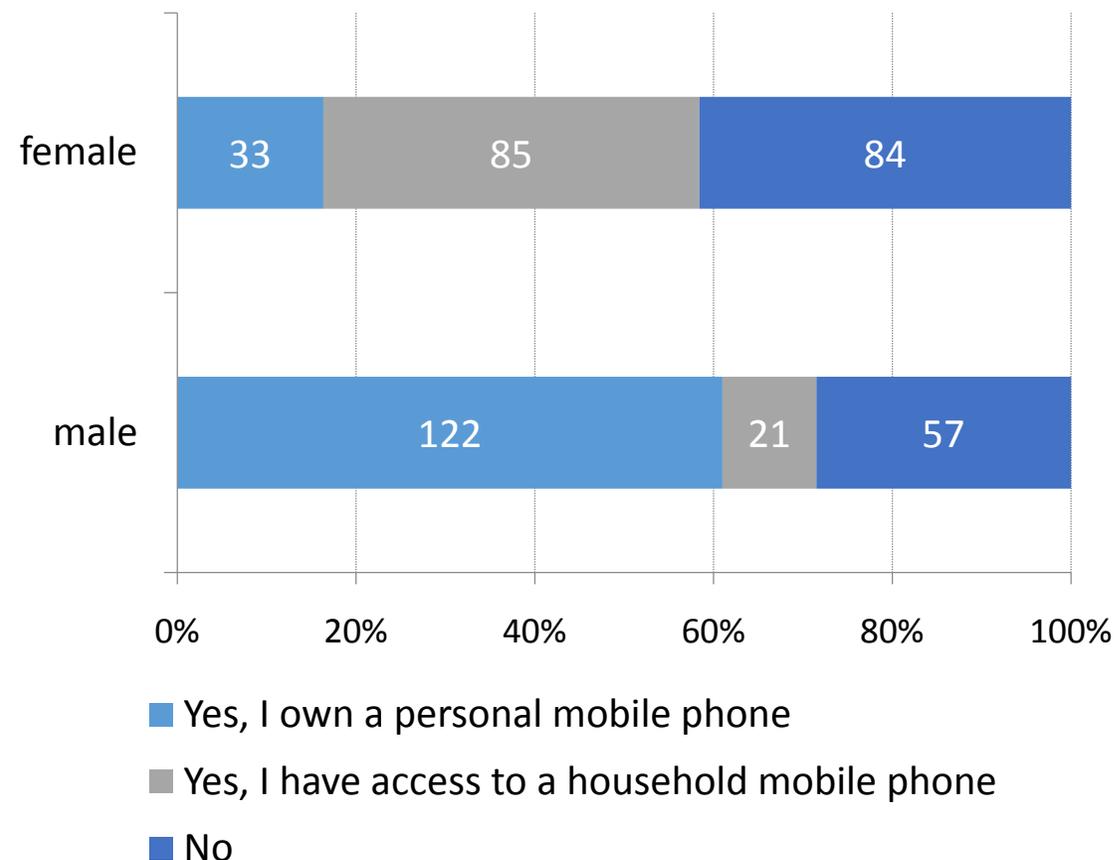
# Challenges: Access to documents and mobile phones

**93% of male** interviewees had a Tazkira, but only **17% of the female** ones<sup>1</sup>.

Most of the women in FGDs did not have a Tazkira – yet formal identification is critical, especially for technology-enabled payment mechanisms.

<sup>1</sup>Samuel Hall (2014) *Social Protection System: An Afghan Case Study: Analysing the Potential of a Child-Focused Social Protection Cash Transfer Programme in Balkh* Project commissioned by UNICEF.

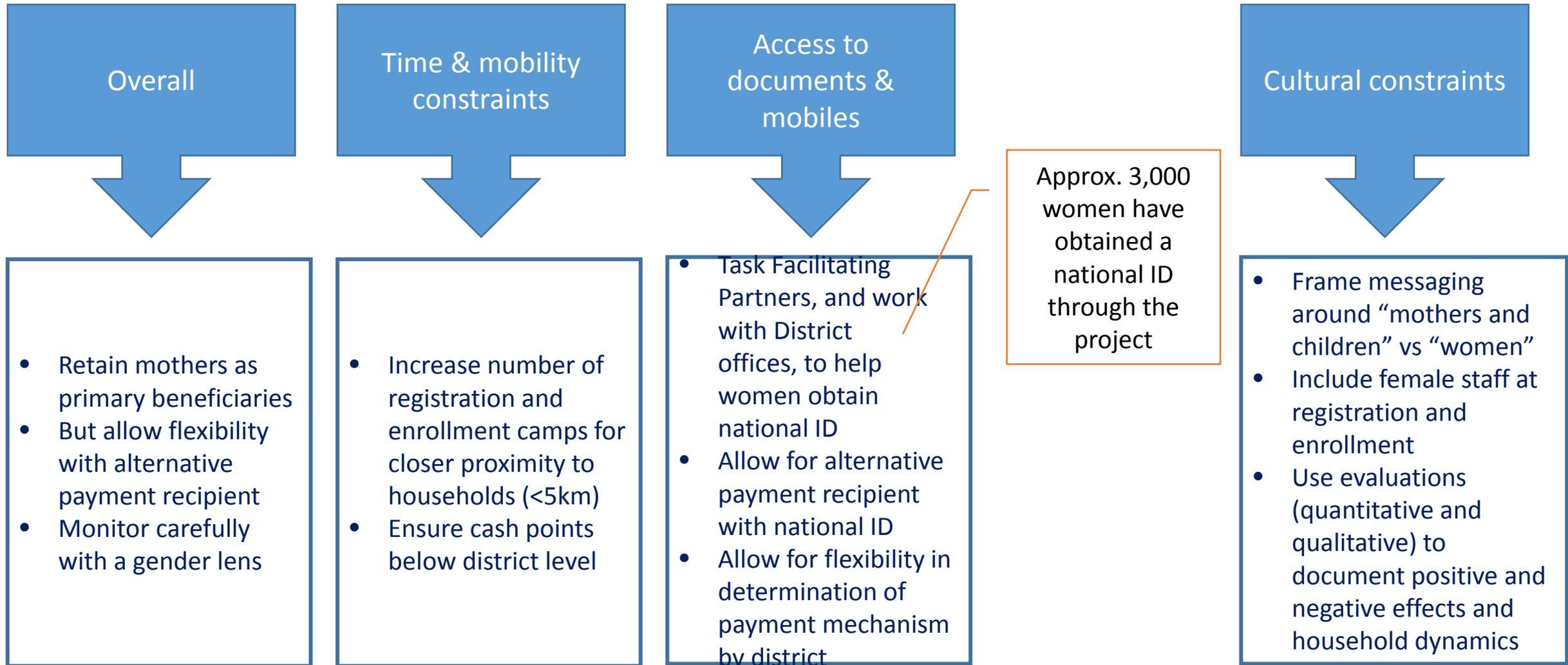
Mobile phone ownership in Yakawlang



Mobile phones in Yakawlang (based on Samuel Hall, External Baseline Evaluation of the Central Highlands Programme, 2015)



# Safety net implications





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# Thank you

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