



Women's Shop Monitoring 2019

Afghanistan Women's Participation Project

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Contents

1	Introduction	2
2	Methodology	3
3	Findings: feedback from shopkeepers	3
4	Findings: feedback from customers	4
5	Conclusion and Recommendations	5
6	Annexes	6
	Annex 1: Shopkeeper Survey	6
	Annex 2: Customer Survey	6

1 Introduction

In 2018, NRC – through its Urban Displacement and Out of Camp (UDOC) programme – partnered with IOM on a project to support women’s participation in out-of-camp settings, while also contributing to global learning on women’s participation techniques. As well as conducting a study (using the IOM Women’s Participation Toolkit) of women’s participation among displaced out-of-camp communities in eastern Afghanistan, the collaboration also allowed NRC to implement a community-led project to address a concern raised by women in the chosen target location – the urban settlement of Sheikh Mesri.

Some of the concerns raised by the women were the long distance and unsafe journey to markets in the city, presenting a challenge to women in accessing these markets; women’s economic exclusion in general (in terms of both livelihoods and access to markets); and the lack of safe ‘women’s spaces’ in the community, especially for women who did not have a friendship with, or relation to, the wives of community leaders (who would often host informal gatherings of women). Based on these highlighted issues, the community and NRC worked together to design a project establishing Women’s Shops. Assessments and consultations regarding the Women’s Shop project took place with the community, local leaders, and neighbourhood committees during July and August. NRC implemented the project in September 2017, when it provided cash grants of \$3,500 each to the five selected shopkeepers¹ to enable them to build the shops and purchase stock – the grant amount was calculated according to a BoQ agreed with the women. These women (and their husbands/family) agreed to allocate a room in their household’s compound for the shop, where only women could come to buy their needed goods.

Although NRC had to close its UDOC programme in East Region in September 2018, it was still able to undertake a first round of post-distribution monitoring on the shops, which revealed positive results. According to the findings, 100% of surveyed customers and four out of five shopkeepers cited the Women’s Shops as providing a preferred shop for women. According to 83% of customers and two out of five shopkeepers, this came with the added benefit of providing a safe space for women to meet and socialise.

NRC’s 2019 Camp Management strategy includes ongoing work to support women’s participation and initiatives to improve women’s safety. In light of this, NRC has conducted a further round of monitoring of the women’s shops during January 2019 to see how the shops are functioning three months later, and to

¹ Further detail on selection of shopkeepers can be found in the End of Project report submitted by NRC to IOM for the project “Reversing Marginalization: Improving Participation of Women and Girls in Urban Displacement and Out-of-Camp Contexts”

help inform whether or not and how to roll out similar projects in other regions. Indeed, funding has already been secured for establishment of women's run shops in the west region for drought-induced IDPs living in make-shift and formal camps in Herat and Badghis provinces. This report presents the findings of the latest monitoring, but NRC also intends to conduct another monitoring visit in March 2019, after which this report will be duly updated.

2 Methodology

The monitoring was conducted by one of NRC's female staff from the Education team, which is still implementing projects in the East region. She conducted a Kobo-based survey with each of the five female shopkeepers, as well as surveying 13 customers with a separate survey. The survey questions are included as annexes.

3 Findings: feedback from shopkeepers

- Four out of five shops were still functioning in their original locations. The fifth shop has reportedly been moved to the main bazaar of Sheikh Mesri settlement, due to a lack of customers in its original location.
 - ✓ **Recommendation:** further follow-up with the shopkeeper and monitoring of the shop in its new location.
- Of the four shops that are still operating, two of these are run by women who report to be the head of their household.
- All four shopkeepers claimed to be the only income earner in their household, with the shop being their only source of income. The average amount earned per month was reported to be around 3,750 AFN, equivalent to almost \$50. Over the course of one year this would work out at nearly \$600 – not a large amount, but above Afghanistan's 2016 GNI which was just \$508 per capita,² and presumably of significance for a household with otherwise no regular income source. Indeed, three out of the four shopkeepers reported to be making more than they expected, and all of them said that the number one benefit of the shop was that it gave them an income.
- One of the shopkeepers reported to earn between 6,000 AFN (\$80) and 8,000 AFN (\$108) per month, another between 3,000 AFN (\$40) and 5,000 AFN (\$66), and the other two between 1,000 AFN (\$13) and 3,000 AFN (\$40).³
 - ✓ **Recommendation:** Additional field visits to the shops to understand what may account for the differences in earnings, and to see what could be done to enhance the earnings of the women reporting a lower monthly income.
- Two of the shopkeepers reported to receive on average between 10 and 14 customers per day, while the other two reported five to nine customers per day; they all said that they received “many different customers”, rather than the same customers each day.
- Women's clothes and shoes were the top selling items, along with children's clothes and materials for sewing and fixing clothes. See table below for more detail.

² Updated GNI is not available at the time of writing. World Bank, <https://data.worldbank.org/?locations=AF-XM>.

³ One of these was the one woman who reported to be earning less than expected.

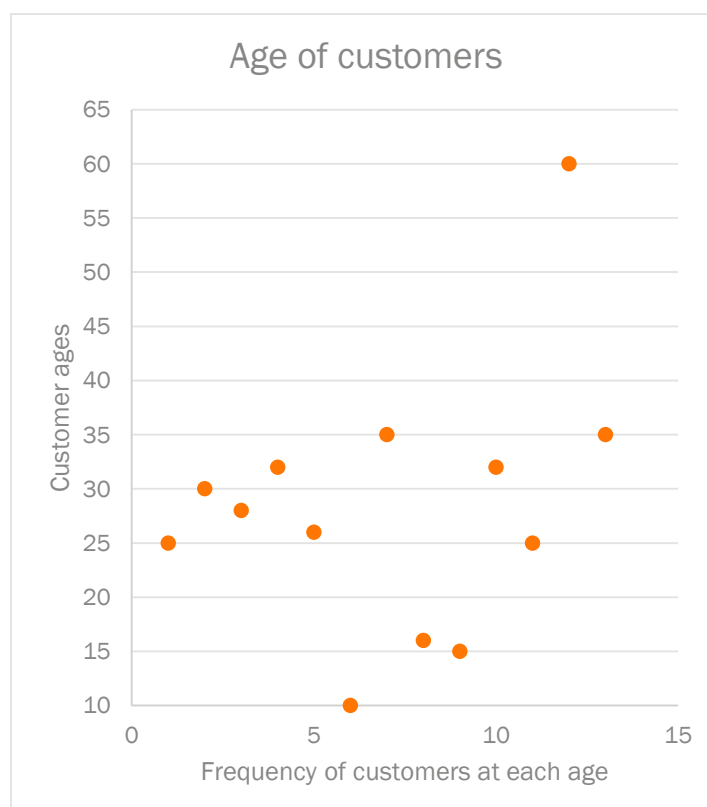
Table 1: Top selling items in the women's shops

	Best-selling item	Second best-selling item	Third best-selling item
Shop 1	Women's clothes	Boys' clothes	Women's shoes
Shop 2	Women's clothes	Fabric	Boys' clothes
Shop 3	Women's shoes	Boy's clothes	Beads
Shop 4	Soap	Women's shoes	Girls' clothes

- NRC had hoped that the women's shops could also be used by women in the community to sell items they have made at home. None of the shopkeepers reported that this is happening.
 - ✓ **Recommendation:** Follow up with women in the community to see what support they might need to start selling items in the shop, with potential to collaborate with NRC's Livelihoods core competency to support them.
- All four women reported that they are personally running the shop themselves, but with support from male relatives.
- When asked about the main challenges they are facing, one of the women said she is not facing any challenge; the remaining three each mentioned a different challenge: (1) it takes up too much time – she does not have time to do her other activities; (2) other people in the community want her to share the benefits of the shop with them (money, items from the shop etc.); (3) her family is not happy that she is running the shop. That said, none of the women said they would rather do a different job than running the shop.
- Although all of the women said that the first benefit of the shop was that it earned them an income, they said that the second benefit of the shop was to allow women from the area to buy the things they need.

4 Findings: feedback from customers

- In terms of the customer profile (of those that were surveyed), they were all female – as hoped and expected. They ranged in age from 10 to 60, with the average age being 28. This is significant, because based on the safety mapping done during the Women's Participation study, it was younger women who felt less comfortable to move around (particularly outside of their immediate neighbourhood), while older women had more freedom of movement. As can be seen in the chart below, all the 13 surveyed customers were between the ages of 10 and 35, except for one who was 60.
- All except one of the customers described themselves as protracted IDPs, while one described herself as a new arrival. This is significant as it shows that the shops are particularly of value for displaced



women. However, further investigation is needed to understand why new arrivals are not using the shops so much (though this could be because there have not been recent displacements to the area).

- All of the surveyed customers said they had visited the shop and purchased items more than five times. The most frequently mentioned items that the women purchased were soap or shampoo, followed by girls' clothes and women's shoes. See chart below for the breakdown.



- Eight of the surveyed customers said that if the shop was not there, they would have to send somebody else to buy the items – indicating that the shops have increased women's access to markets. The remaining said they would go to the city, but all of the surveyed women said that they would prefer to come to these shops because they feel safer, and four of them also said it was easier to find what they needed in the shops – indicating that the shops have increased women's feeling of safety, as well as their access to markets and participation in the local economy.
- The above finding is also backed up by the fact that all of the women said that one of their main two reasons for visiting the shop was to buy the things they need (eight of them said it was the first reason). The other main reason to visit the shops (cited as the 'first' reason for five of the women) was to meet and socialise with other women – indicating the value of the shops in increasing women's participation in the social life of their community, and providing them a safe space to come together.

5 Conclusion and Recommendations

NRC and the targeted communities hoped that the women's shops would help to address the following issues that had been raised by women in the community (particularly displaced women):

- Long distance and unsafe journey to markets in the city, presenting a challenge to women in accessing these markets
- Women's economic exclusion in general (in terms of both livelihoods and access to markets)
- The lack of safe 'women's spaces' in the community

The findings above indicate that all these challenges have been mitigated by the shops insofar as:

- Women are able to purchase items that they need within their own neighbourhood, without having to make a journey to the city that they feel is unsafe for them
- The women shopkeepers are making a small, albeit significant, income from the shops
- Women are able to meet and socialise in a space that they feel is safe and comfortable for them

NRC should, if possible, conduct further monitoring to determine:

- Why some shops are making more money than others, and how those earning less can improve their takings
- Why one shop closed and how it is operating in its new location (likely now run by a male relative)
- Whether or not it would be possible to encourage women from the community to sell their own handmade items in the shops, and what support would be needed for this
- Whether or not the shopkeepers need further technical support to improve the profitability of their shops

In addition, NRC should conduct consultations and assessments with women in other areas of Afghanistan (in particular where the Camp Management programme is being implemented (Herat and Badghis for drought-induced IDPs living in formal and informal camps; and in Kabul for protracted IDPs living in informal settlements) to determine the relevance, appropriateness, and feasibility of establishing women's shops in these locations.

6 Annexes

Annex 1: Shopkeeper Survey

Attached as PDF

Annex 2: Customer Survey

Attached as PDF

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