



**SIGAR**

Office of the Special Inspector General  
for Afghanistan Reconstruction

December 7, 2016

The Honorable Gayle E. Smith  
Administrator  
U.S. Agency for International Development

Dear Administrator Smith:

I am writing to request additional information regarding USAID's implementation and oversight of the Promoting Gender Equity in National Priority Programs (Promote), USAID's largest gender-focused initiative. USAID launched the Promote program in July 2013 when USAID's Administrator announced the program during an event at the U.S. Institute of Peace, which coincided with the release of the request for proposals to implement the program.

USAID designed Promote to facilitate the advancement of Afghan women into leadership positions in government, the private sector, and civil society through education and training programs. In October 2014, USAID announced the award of 5-year, indefinite-delivery/indefinite quantity contracts for Promote to three prime contractors to implement the program: Chemonics International, Development Alternatives, Inc., and Tetra Tech, Inc.

As of October 30, 2016, USAID has committed \$280 million to Promote and has sought to raise an additional \$200 million from foreign donors.<sup>1</sup> When USAID announced the program in 2013, then-Administrator Rajiv Shah, stated,

"The program will make available more than \$400 million dollars with contributions of nearly \$200 million dollars from the United States, and we seek to raise more the \$200 million dollars from other international donors many of which have already expressed a willingness to invest."<sup>2</sup>

However, more than a year later when the contracts were awarded in October 2014, no other donors had committed funds to the program.

In March 2015, I wrote to then-Acting Administrator Alfonso Lenhardt to request information related to the development and initial implementation of the Promote program.<sup>3</sup> My letter expressed my concern about whether USAID would be able to effectively implement, monitor, and assess the impact of Promote.

In response to my inquiry about international donor commitments, USAID stated that it "realized early on that the Promote project had great potential to engage other donors increasingly interested in the issue of women's rights" and that it "is evaluating potential Promote partnership opportunities

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<sup>1</sup> When USAID initially launched the program in July 2013, the agency planned to spend \$200 million. The agency later decided to commit \$280 million.

<sup>2</sup> USAID, *Remarks by Administrator Rajiv Shah at the U.S. Institute of Peace Regarding Afghanistan Promote*, July 18, 2013.

<sup>3</sup> SIGAR, *Inquiry Letter: USAID's Promoting Gender Equity in National Priority Programs*, SIGAR 15-44-SP, March 27, 2015.

with other international donors.”<sup>4</sup> However, since then, USAID has reported that it has still not obtained any international commitments to the program.<sup>5</sup>

In addition, I am concerned that a large portion of the funding USAID has committed to Promote may go mostly to U.S. contractors, rather than spent to directly benefit Afghan women. My concerns are shared by Afghan women themselves. In late August and early September 2016, a team of female SIGAR officials went to Afghanistan on a fact-finding mission to identify the major challenges facing Afghan women. The SIGAR team interviewed more than 40 prominent Afghan women, including President Ghani’s wife, First Lady Rula Ghani. Among other things, our interviews showed that, “As with many other U.S. aid projects, they fear that despite what appears to be generous funding, a large portion will be absorbed by U.S. contractors, leaving little to actually reach Afghan women.”<sup>6</sup>

To help ensure that the Promote program is successful in achieving important benefits for Afghan women, SIGAR recently initiated an audit to examine USAID’s efforts to implement, oversee, and evaluate Promote since its launch in November 2014. In support of that audit, and to better understand the reasons for the lack of international donor support and ongoing concern related to security and overhead costs, please provide responses to the following questions, with supporting documentation, no later than December 23, 2016:

1. In response to our March 2015, inquiry, USAID stated that “the first phase of conversations with international donors focused on outreach and explanation.”<sup>7</sup> How did USAID engage donors during this “first phase of conversations with potential international donors”?
  - a. Did USAID formally request commitments for Promote from international donors?
  - b. Did any international donors provide any formal correspondence related to USAID requests for Promote funding?
  - c. Did any donors provide specific reasons for their decision not to commit any funding to the Promote program?
  - d. What plans does USAID have to continue seeking out funding commitments from international donors to support Promote?
2. Have any areas of overlap been identified between USAID’s Promote activities and other gender-related programs implemented by international donors in Afghanistan? Please identify the international donors and the respective programs.
  - a. What steps have been made to eliminate the duplication of efforts by USAID’s Promote activities and other gender-related programs implemented by international donors in Afghanistan?
3. In the two-plus years since the contracts were awarded for Promote, what percentage of total program disbursements were actually spent on security and overhead costs for the three contractors and program implementers?

I am submitting this request under the authority of Public Law No. 110-181, as amended, and the Inspector General Act of 1978, as amended. Should you or your staff have any questions about this

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<sup>4</sup> USAID Response to SIGAR, *Inquiry Letter: USAID’s Promoting Gender Equity in National Priority Programs*, SIGAR 15-44-SP, March 27, 2015.

<sup>5</sup> USAID, OPPD, response to SIGAR vetting, October 12, 2016; USAID, OG, response to SIGAR vetting, October 11, 2016.

<sup>6</sup> SIGAR, *Quarterly Report to the United States Congress*, October 30, 2016.

<sup>7</sup> USAID Response to SIGAR, *Inquiry Letter: USAID’s Promoting Gender Equity in National Priority Programs*, SIGAR 15-44-SP, March 27, 2015.

project, please contact Mr. Matthew Dove, Director of Special Projects, at [REDACTED] or [REDACTED]

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "John F. Sopko". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

John F. Sopko  
Special Inspector General  
for Afghanistan Reconstruction

Encl: I – USAID Response, dated December 29, 2016

ENCLOSURE I: USAID COMMENTS FOR SIGAR 16-57-SP, DATED 20  
SEPTEMBER 2016

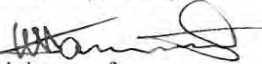
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MEMORANDUM

12/29/2016

**TO:** John F. Sopko  
Special Inspector General for  
Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR)

**FROM:** William Hammink,   
Assistant to the Administrator for  
Afghanistan and Pakistan Affairs (OAPA)

**SUBJECT:** Mission Response to SIGAR Inquiry Letter titled: Promoting  
Gender Equity in National Priority Programs (SIGAR-17-16-  
SP)

**REF:** SIGAR Transmittal email dated 12/8/2016

USAID welcomes the opportunity to discuss the Promote Women's Empowerment (Promote) successes and achievements.

Promote is USAID's flagship effort to increase women's presence in the labor market, increase their contributions to Afghanistan's economy, and expand the number of women in decision-making and leadership roles within government and in civil society. Promote is comprised of four major components: Women's Leadership Development was awarded in September 2014; Women in Government was awarded in April 2015; Women in the Economy was awarded in July 2015; and, Musharikat (Civil Society) was awarded in September 2015. Promote has just finished the first full year of implementation with all task orders awarded and roll-out complete.

Activity	Target Age Group	Regional Scope	Educational Attainment Level
Leadership Development	15 - 30	Kabul, Jalalabad, Mazar-e-Sharif, Kandahar and Herat	Varying
Women in Government	18 - 34	Kabul, Jalalabad, Mazar-e-Sharif, Kandahar and Herat	University graduates

Musharikat (Women in Civil Society)	All ages	Nationwide	Varying
Women in the Economy	18 – 30	Nationwide	Varying

Despite heightened insecurity for women, and the challenges of working in Afghanistan, Promote activities have adapted to challenges and realized significant successes over the past year. Among those successes, USAID highlights the following:

**Women’s Leadership Development (WLD):**

- Leadership curriculum designed, developed and implemented for both young women and for adolescent girls.
- Over 2,000 young women graduated from leadership training.
- Over 4,700 adolescent girls in leadership training.
- Over 300 community support activities implemented in Kabul, Kandahar, Herat, Jalalabad and Mazar-e-Sharif by young women in leadership training. Activities include addressing issues like: recycling, health issues, orphans, family nutrition, crime reduction, small business startups, and education.

**Women in Government (WIG):**

- Twenty-seven episodes of “One Village, a Thousand Voices” produced and aired to explore topics of women’s participation in family and society. “One Village” is broadcast nationwide by Radio Azadi.
- “Obstacles to Women in the Workplace” report drafted by WIG and disseminated by the Ministry of Women’s Affairs, which provides a protocol to the Government for how to integrate and equitably treat women in a professional setting.
- Partnering with the Ministry of Labor and the Ministry of Rural Reconstruction and Development to provide six months of certified civil service training, three months of leadership training and three months of ministry-placed internships for Promote participants.
- Job placement services made available to WIG graduates for employment in the government in Kabul and nationwide.
- More than 500 women are currently in the WIG program and an additional 2,600 expected to be trained and interned in the next year.
- Leadership training from Women’s Leadership Development provided to the WIG trainees.

**Musharikat – Women in Civil Society:**

- National Summit held in May 2016 with women and organizations from 33 provinces attending. Summit participants selected top three issues for directing coalition work: access to education/information, elimination of violence and participation in the economy. These three priority topics are now areas of focus for 131 separate Civil Society Organizations and 116 individual activists that are engaged with Musharikat.
- Coalitions formed, and mobile phone platform established for connectivity and information sharing nationwide.
- Eleven regional forums held to prepare for the National Summit in which civil society organizations consulted with local communities.
- Approximately 33 grants approved for community work on priority issues (\$25,000 or less).
- Musharikat Economy Coalition working with Women in the Economy to provide job placement and business development services.

**Women in the Economy (WIE):**

- Partnered with a Kabul-based IT Company, Code Weekend, to hold a contest for Afghan woman coders to design anti-sexual harassment software for smartphones. Winners developed “Muhafiz” (“Bodyguard”), an application which is being released in partnership with the Ministry of the Interior, USAID’s Office of Economic Growth, and Promote Musharikat.
- Afghan Jobs for Peace Program implemented in partnership with President Ghani’s Office and the Ministry of Labor to support employment opportunities for 7,500 women of all educational backgrounds in 34 provinces.
- Over 5,900 women enrolled in job placement services.
- Over 1,700 women placed in apprenticeships and internships, nationwide.
- Over 230 woman-owned or woman-employing businesses supported with internships and apprenticeships.
- Four woman-owned businesses (leather products, saffron, and fashion) participated in “Exhibition Afghanistan”, a showcase of Afghan products to an international consumer and wholesale market in Dubai.
- Agreements made with microfinance institutions to provide outreach services to educate Afghan women on access to finance.
- In partnership with the Ministry of the Hajj, WIE is developing the “Women’s Legacy and Inheritance Rights Policy,” a compilation of the economic rights given to women by Islam under Sharia law, and a national



action plan (NAP) for implementation through educational programs for Mullahs/masjids, women rights advocates, civil society organizations, and legal professional associations. The NAP will also include a media campaign to raise general awareness on women's legacy and inheritance rights. WIE collaborated with WLD, Musharikat, and ARAZI-Afghanistan Independent Land Authority on the NAP.

**Please find responses to SIGAR's questions below.**

**1. In response to our March 2015 inquiry, USAID stated that "the first phase of conversations with international donors focused on outreach and explanation." How did USAID engage donors during this first phase of conversations with potential international donors?**

In 2014 – 2015, before the Promote procurement process was complete, USAID identified and engaged with the United Kingdom, Norway and Japan. This donor engagement resulted in USAID partnering with Japan to provide Promote leadership training to Japan-scholarship-funded Afghan women police.

As Promote task orders were awarded, USAID determined that the top priority for the first of five years of implementation would be project roll-out and performance management.

**a. Did USAID formally request commitments for Promote from international donors?**

USAID made informal (verbal) requests for potential Promote collaboration and/or funding through the Administrator (Dr. Raj Shah) starting in September 2014 at the UN General Assembly. Dr. Shah also made a formal (written) request to Norway as a follow up to the Afghan Women's Forum in November of 2014. Information on how to contribute to Promote was shared within the donor community in Kabul and Washington, D.C.

**b. Did any international donors provide any formal correspondence related to USAID requests for Promote funding?**

No, there was a verbal response from Norway.

**c. Did any donors provide specific reasons for their decision not to commit any funding to the Promote program?**

In 2015, Minister Brende (Norway) provided verbal feedback to Dr. Shah that a decline in the overall available development funding for Afghanistan would prevent Norway from contributing to Promote.

**d. What plans does USAID have to continue seeking out funding commitments from international donors to support Promote?**

Promote is designed to achieve the results targeted with or without other donor funding. USAID will continue to coordinate with other donors and keep them informed of programmatic success.

**2. Have any areas of overlap been identified between USAID's Promote activities and other gender-related programs implemented by international donors in Afghanistan? Please identify the international donors and the respective programs.**

Extensive interviews with other donors as part of the Promote design process served to prevent duplication.

USAID/Afghanistan's Gender Office staff members regularly attend donor and stakeholder meetings to coordinate activities and eliminate duplication of efforts. For example, when the Embassy of Korea provided funding for Gender Studies at Kabul University, the Gender Office repurposed planned Gender Studies funding. When the Canadian and Norwegian Embassies were planning women's activities, USAID met with them and informed their designs to avoid duplication with Promote.

Additionally, the Promote monthly eNewsletter is widely distributed to other international donors to keep them abreast of activities and avoid duplication.

**a. What steps have been made to eliminate the duplication of efforts by USAID's Promote activities and other gender-related programs implemented by international donors in Afghanistan?**

Please see the response provided to question # 2 above.

**3. In the two-plus years since the contracts were awarded for Promote, what percentage of total program disbursements were actually spent on security and overhead costs for the three contractors and program implementers?**



Across the four Promote Task Orders, approximately 18% of total disbursements were spent on overhead and security as of December 2016.