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Development Communications Strategies and Domestic Violence in Afghanistan

Women and children are often in great danger in the place where they should be safest: within their families.

-- Mehr Khan, Director, UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre[1]

Afghan women occupy a curious space in global politics. Years of fear and suffering under the repressive Taliban regime have followed years of being targets of war crimes during the Mujaheddin civil war, and being used as an unwilling centrepiece in sweeping Communist government reforms in the late 1970s. Exoticized, defaced, displaced, widowed, crippled, broken, and victimized, Afghan women have served as an emblem of clan and national honour as well as a symbol of oppression, justifying rallying cries for wars of protection, revenge, and liberation through two decades of armed conflict in Afghanistan.

The many violences Afghan women have faced have been extreme and unforgiving. Child marriage, trafficking and bonded labor, kidnapping by armed groups, landmines, mobility restrictions, stonings and executions, forced veiling under the all-enveloping burqa, and exclusion from the world of work have been inescapable realities. More mundane violences Afghan women have faced away from the outside world, however, where danger has been at the hands of intimate partners and members of the extended family, while also endemic, is only gradually gaining more attention, documentation, and understanding.

Recent media campaigns on violence against women have emerged to advocate for changes in Afghan society and promote a shift in public understanding of the problem. Such media interventions have had to tread a careful line, however, as Afghan women and family honor are imbued with extreme cultural sensitivity. The instability of Afghanistan's transition has further underscored the need to avoid controversy in the volatile post-conflict environment.

This article presents a brief treatment of post-conflict Afghanistan and some communications tactics that have begun to carefully, and to some extent indirectly, address domestic violence in the country. I will present a case study of a media initiative carried out in 2005 by UNIFEM. UNIFEM, the United Nations Development Fund for Women, provides technical support and coordination for gender programs in Afghanistan and is one of the main international bodies mandated to eliminate violence against women. I have worked for UNIFEM in the past, but this article is written in my private capacity as an independent researcher and does not necessarily reflect the beliefs or opinions of UNIFEM. My

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[1] See "Domestic Violence Against Women and Girls." Innocenti Digest volume 6. Rome: Innocenti Research Centre, 2000.

discussion will be limited to one perspective out of a range of approaches and frameworks related to domestic violence in Afghanistan.

Post-conflict Afghanistan

Instability characterized the immediate post-Taliban period in 2002, with large-scale reconstruction projects and a sizeable influx of international funds and workers fundamentally transforming the Afghan landscape. The move from the ascetic regime of the Taliban to political and economic systems predicated on Western ideals of pluralist open-market representative democracy was rapid, and Afghan society, particularly in urban areas, struggled to cope with the unpredictability and anxiety of transition. While initially the post-conflict period and reconstruction were greeted with optimism and hope, poorly managed expectations, broken promises, and the limited agency of Afghans in deciding the future of their country lead by mid-2003 to a downturn in public opinion towards the foreigner presence. While, by 2005, such negative public opinion was more often tempered with recognition that life in Afghanistan was better than it had been before, distrust of foreigners and criticism of their reconstruction agendas continued to be a strong thread of Afghan discontent (Kamal 2006).

Many Afghans dismiss the reconstruction period's emphasis on women's participation as being 'overly Western' or a corruption of Afghan society and morals. Such tensions are not new, as movements for women's emancipation in Afghanistan have historically been imposed from a central governing elite and resisted by religious groups and the urban lower middle class (Centlivres-Demont 1994). Alternatively viewed as modernization or decadence, recent changes in women's status have been influenced by contradictory forces: international agencies have invested in independent media outlets staffed and managed entirely by women, while conservative groups have sought to ban women's voices from TV and radio broadcasts in different parts of the country. Some development agencies have enforced female quotas in their hiring practices, while women from many Afghan households have been forbidden from working with international organizations due to concerns that international workplaces are linked with prostitution. In 2005, a note attached to one of three murdered Afghan women in Baghlan Province claimed that the murders were "a lesson" to other Afghan women working with international organizations (IRIN 2005).

Tensions in Afghan society also arise out of the development sector's generous provision of female literacy courses and employment quotas. Some men feel that opportunities for women surpass those open to men, and there are occasional indications that resentment against women has increased as a result. The cartoon on the left, published in a more conservative Afghan newspaper, offers some insight into sentiments raised by initiatives on women's rights. The cartoon imagery is clear in its criticism of

This cartoon, published in an Afghan newspaper, shows an unveiled miniskirt-wearing woman beating a man on the head with a "law that women must be supported" club as the man asks "don't hit! Why are you hitting?" household power reversals in Afghanistan: an angry, muscular woman dressed in fashionable Western clothing uses the "law that women must be supported" to beat a passive, fearful man wearing a patched shirt against the background of a broken home.

Looking past the immediate 'male backlash' sentiments he expresses, the man in the cartoon could be seen to pose a challenging question: why reify women's concerns into a counter-productive form of political correctness that excludes men, when men could be helpful in participating in and championing social causes in support of women? Historically, gains in Afghan women's rights have tended to emerge from voluntary concessions made by men in power rather than as a result of women's lobbying (Dupree 1998). Further, Afghan men and women's lives are intimately intertwined, leaving programs that focus on women rather than the entire Muslim household to be unsustainable and ineffective (Dupree 1998; Alwani and Abugideiri 2003; among others). It would be simplistic to suggest that reform to the entrenched and deep male power structures of Afghan society would be conceded easily or without acrimony between the sexes. However, there may be some truth to the suggestion that strategies for women's empowerment based on Western feminist movements and the fight for individual rights in secular industrial nations do not work well within the religious household-centred logics of Afghanistan. Indeed, some recent analysis of gender practice in post-Taliban Afghanistan has again reiterated the need to stop sidelining Afghan men, their needs, and their interests in the gender debate (Abirafeh 2005).

Domestic violence, already a sensitive issue in its own right, is particularly difficult to address in Afghanistan. First, domestic violence is not a concept that is well-defined or high on the Afghan social agenda. The terms 'domestic violence' or 'intimate partner violence' are not yet terms that are in widespread use in public discourse or even among development elites, for reasons that will be discussed shortly. Second, women's lives with their intimate partners, especially in rural areas, are most often based on multiple, interrelated forms of violence, making it difficult to focus on or even find simple cases of domestic violence. Is a child bride's misery categorized as domestic violence or violations of child rights? Does a woman, forced to marry,

> Traditions and customary practices contributing to domestic violence in Afghanistan include the following:
> - Child marriage
> - *Badal* (two families exchanging females for marriage)
> - *Bad* (As compensation for a crime, giving a female away in marriage to the family of the victim)
> - Enforced marriage of a widow to her husband's male relative, as this often leads to harsh treatment of the 'burdensome' widow and her children
> - Giving *Mahr* (Islamic bride-price) to the family of the bride rather than the bride herself, as this can lead to the 'sale' of young daughters

suffer domestic violence or slavery? Third, there are barriers to addressing domestic violence directly. The primary focus of relevant media campaigns, reforms to the judicial system, and mobilizations of women's groups has instead been on ending harmful customary practices. Such practices are understood implicitly to lead to a very high likelihood of

prolonged and harsh domestic violence, but the domestic violence itself is not discussed. Instead, traditions that contribute to it are vigorously denounced as a measure of the backwardness of society, especially in rural areas. Reasons for not explicitly addressing, or indeed, using the term 'domestic violence' might include

- its invisibility relative to other more extreme forms of violence against women,
- acceptance of everyday household violence and forced marital sex as normal,
- rationalization of domestic violence as a measure to protect clan honour,
- discomfort at trespassing into the sanctity of the Afghan home, and
- widespread belief that wife beatings are permissible under Islam.

Finally, there is very little reliable data on domestic violence in Afghanistan. The Afghan Ministry of Women's Affairs and organizations like the Afghan Women Judges Association, Medica Mondiale, or Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission have documented and worked on exceptional cases of domestic violence for several years.[2] However, they have not had sufficient capacity or resources to systematize and extend their efforts beyond ad hoc, reactive measures. Development literature suggests that domestic violence rises in post-conflict situations due to "the availability of weapons, the violence male family members have experienced or meted out, the lack of jobs, shelter, and basic services" (Rehn and Sirleaf 2002, 14). Further, anecdotally, numerous activists suggest that female perpetrators of domestic violence (usually female in-laws or stepmothers) account for a great deal of violence in households. As of this writing,[3] however, there is limited information on the prevalence and severity of domestic violence in Afghanistan, and its more egregious form of honor killings is underreported and covered up. One exception to this is the degree of coverage Afghan women's suicides by self-immolation have received in the media,[4] raising awareness that something is going fundamentally awry within the household and that female despair needs urgently to be addressed.

Case study: UNIFEM media strategy

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[2] For coverage of some exceptional cases of domestic violence, see
- Kamal, Sarah. No Longer Behind Closed Doors: Violence Against Women. UN Chronicle Volume XLII Number 3. http://www.un.org/Pubs/chronicle/2005/issue3/0305p55.html
- Sites, Kevin. Child Bride. Yahoo! News, March 20, 2006. http://hotzone.yahoo.com/b/hotzone/blogs2986

[3] UNIFEM announced an initiative to maintain a database for tracking violence against women on 28 February 2006. For more information please see http://www.unifem.org/news_events/story_detail.php?StoryID=412.

[4] The Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission released a report in March 2006 citing over 150 cases of women's self-immolation in western Afghanistan and 34 cases in the southeast. See "Evaluation report on General Situation of Women in Afghanistan," http://www.aihrc.org.af/rep_eng_wom_situation_8_march.htm

One of the most direct and protracted media interventions combating violence against women in Afghanistan was conducted by UNIFEM in 2005. Given that women inhabit a very sensitive space in Afghan society as emblems of honor, and Afghans distrust foreigners in general and Western norms regarding women in particular, UNIFEM had to choose its media strategies carefully to avoid causing harm. UNIFEM's strategy was to discuss gender concerns within the framework of benefits to the family and Afghan society, and repeatedly highlight concerns over violence from multiple perspectives directly and indirectly, embedded among numerous interrelated issues relevant to Afghan men and women.

Historically, there was clear precedent to justify such care: zealously enforced reforms by the Communist government in 1978 decreeing, among other things, compulsory women's literacy and fundamental changes to Afghan marriages, caused outrage and formed much of the basis for refugee migration and bloody insurgency during the Soviet occupation beginning in 1979 (Centlivres-Demont 1994). Further, there is generally resistance to Afghan government interference in the internal life of communities due to the insular nature of rural politics and traditions of self-government in Afghan villages (Rubin 1994). Domestic matters and internal conflicts are understood to be in the private realm, and not a space where the government, let alone the international community, can legitimately intervene.

A more practical concern for UNIFEM, however, was access to media production infrastructure. The Taliban had banned most forms of media, destroyed printing presses, cassettes, videotapes, photographs, and televisions, and allowed only one official broadcast, Voice of Shari'at (formerly the national state radio station, Radio Afghanistan) in the areas they controlled.[5] After the fall of the Taliban, there was heavy investment in rebuilding media infrastructure. By 2005, Afghanistan boasted a wide range of media choice: hundreds of publications, around 50 radio stations, 5 major television stations as well as their affiliates, Internet, satellite television and radio, and more. This diverse local media was augmented by an increase in foreign broadcasts reaching Afghan soil from institutions such as the BBC, Voice of America, Radio Pakistan, Deutsche Welle, and Radio Tehran. Conducting a national media campaign became complicated by the fact that media outlets were owned and operated by very disparate groups, and purchasing production or airtime was very expensive. Further, aside from a handful of women-managed media outlets, the vast majority of state and local media were dominated and controlled by men. Pressing forward with a coordinated, effective, and comprehensive media campaign upholding women's rights with a limited budget given the many competing voices and interests in the media sphere posed significant challenges.

UNIFEM's strategy was finally to publish and feed a "toolkit" of arguments and information necessary for advocacy on gender concerns to media across Afghanistan. In March 2005,

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[5] This applies to the areas under Taliban control only. The Northern Alliance, who retained control over around 10 percent of Afghanistan throughout their battles with the Taliban, operated their own radio and television station from the north, and did not ban other media forms.

UNIFEM distributed over 1400 English and Dari copies of the founding issue of the toolkit, called Gender Advocacy in Afghanistan, to journalist training centres, journalist associations, media outlets, and news agencies across the country as well as civil society organizations, UN agencies, government ministries, and research centres. The aim of the toolkit was to facilitate and strengthen gender-based reporting across the country, and it operated on a number of principles:

Ensuring that coverage of toolkit issues eased Afghan journalists' workload

The toolkit freely donated a skeletal structure for journalistic pieces on gender every month, aiming to make reporting on gender very attractive and easy in the hard deadlines and stress of the media world. The toolkit provided sources and, where possible, Internet sites relevant to the information it provided and did not require attribution for its own contributors' writings. By bringing together accurate and contextually sensitive resources that journalists would otherwise have a more difficult time finding in the confusion and devastated infrastructure of the post-conflict period, the toolkit worked to ensure that coverage of the month's gender issues would be a voluntary yet pragmatic choice for the media.

Coordinating gender advocacy messages across institutions, platforms, and languages

Language in Afghanistan can vary a great deal from one region to the next, so the toolkit's condensed gender advocacy information was designed to support media outlets in discussing issues in their own local languages, framed in their community's concerns. Published in Dari, the Afghan government's working language, the toolkit content was intended for local translation, framing, and dissemination via radio, television, news agency, newspapers or magazines. Further, the toolkit was also distributed to training centres, libraries, the UN, NGOs, and government bodies, hoping to strengthen the impact and authority of its core messages through many-layered multi-platform repetition.

Embedding core concerns over violence against women among social issues more immediately compelling to the male dominated media sector

Each volume of the toolkit presented skeletal level facts, arguments, and information on four or five gender problems, with at least one problem portraying matters from a male point of view while the rest focused on women or women and men. Highlighting the financial, religious, and social burdens gender problems caused for men in Afghanistan, the toolkit worked to demonstrate that gender was not only relevant to women. Furthermore, by taking men's side and raising awareness of a number of male concerns made invisible by the gender sector's more entrenched focus on women, the toolkit framed women's suffering and needs with sensitivity towards the suffering of men.

For example, where much had been made of women's low literacy rates (14%), the toolkit opened discussion on Afghan men's literacy rates (43%), arguing that there was a surprising dearth of literacy projects for men given Afghanistan's male literacy rate being fourth lowest

in the world.[6] The toolkit also advocated for the rights of the disabled as a predominantly male issue (78% of Afghanistan's disabled are men) and presented links to associations offering vocational and computer training for the disabled.[7] Aside from the ethical imperative of raising awareness of injustices against men in Afghan society, inclusion of male issues worked to show that agreement with the toolkit's gender arguments in favor of men called for similar openness to arguments regarding women's interests, and vice versa.

Illustrating how practices traditionally understood as harmful to women are harmful to men

To give added weight and fresh perspective to women's issues already well covered by the media, the toolkit worked to demonstrate the harm posed to men by practices harmful to women. Forced marriage, for example, seen more often as a form of violence against women, was investigated from a male point of view, highlighting cases of male depression and powerlessness in the face of clan pressure to accede to marriage arrangements.[8] In another example, in discussing difficulties men face in finding employment, the toolkit quietly noted that households in which women were allowed to work were more financially stable than those in which only men worked,[9] indirectly advocating for women's employment.

Focusing gender arguments primarily on values with resonance within the community

The toolkit's gender issues were presented in persuasive form using ethics and logic, arguing for change using Islamic edicts, Afghan values, the wellbeing of Afghan families and society, nationalistic pride, the Afghan Constitution and law, and the legal obligations on the Afghan state under international human rights treaties. The basis for the persuasive power of the toolkit came from appealing to values the audience already held rather than suggesting the need for a shift to a new paradigm or ideology; consequently, the impetus for Afghans' changed behavior would emerge from the dissonance of not acting according to their own belief system rather than concession to the cudgel of the "law that women must be supported." Maintenance of women's rights and welfare was positioned as a natural pillar of Afghan society – indeed, Afghans pride themselves on the high esteem they accord women and motherhood – rather than a foreign, or especially Western, concept. This may seem like a self-evident point, but it was often not practiced in Afghanistan's media initiatives, especially since international human rights frameworks are based around the individual rather than the collective, and consequently rights-based media campaigns have often been subtly shaded with assumptions and arguments not entirely in keeping with Afghanistan's community-based social order.

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[6] Women's and men's literacy rates were in fact comparable, with both rated as fourth lowest in the world by the 2004 United Nations Human Development Report. See "Afghan Men's Literacy," Gender Advocacy in Afghanistan, Volume 2, May 2005, available from http://afghanistan.unifem.org.
[7] See "Men and Disability in Afghanistan," Gender Advocacy in Afghanistan, Volume 3, June 2005.
[8] See "Afghan Society and Forced Marriage," Gender Advocacy in Afghanistan, Volume 1, March 2005.
[9] See "Afghan Men's Employment in Afghanistan," Gender Advocacy in Afghanistan, Volume 4, July 2005.

Careful choosing of culturally resonant arguments was particularly important when tackling sensitive issues. In Afghanistan, beatings, mobility restrictions, child marriages, or honor killings are often justified on the grounds of protecting clan honour, which is closely linked with the reputation and virtue of females in the clan. Women leaving the protection of their clan have very few alternatives. Unchaperoned women passing a night away from the household bring great shame to themselves and their families, and face harsh violence or even death should they try to return home. Women's shelters are therefore very poorly regarded institutions, perceived as brothels rather than legitimate havens for battered women and children. The toolkit's section on shelters, entitled "Protection of Women in Afghanistan," thus was careful to begin by applauding the Afghan value of respecting and protecting women; cite the Prophet Mohammad's example in protecting women in his household; list uncontroversial reasons (danger for themselves or their children at the hands of alcohol abusers, armed groups, trafficking, murder) for women to flee households that failed to protect them; and emphasize the Ministry of Women's Affairs as the responsible body protecting women through the shelter system.[10] While much more certainly did need to be said on shelters to legitimize them in the eyes of Afghans, the toolkit worked from the belief that social change is a longterm project and aimed to only ever be an acceptably small step away from majority public opinion.

Ensuring the toolkit's legitimacy and intrinsic usefulness

Each issue of the toolkit was researched carefully, presenting factual information and precise wordings of Afghan laws and relevant passages from the Quran, as well as including information and phone numbers that people could turn to for more information or help. Statistics useful for advocacy but also interesting in their own right, such as the illiteracy rates of Afghanistan versus those of its neighbors, aimed to offer something new from authoritative sources on every issue and act as a useful addition to journalist libraries. The toolkit's communications process was two-tiered: the toolkit's immediate audience was journalists and media developers, and via them the toolkit hoped to reach its final audience of the general Afghan public. The accuracy, reliability, apparent social benefit, and timeliness of chosen issues factored into developing a goodwill relationship with journalists and worked to lessen the likelihood of the toolkit being discarded or dismissed.

Sensitizing the media sector itself to gender issues

The toolkit played a dual role in both providing information to media for their purpose of changing attitudes in Afghan society generally, and also working to change attitudes within the media sector in the process. Afghan journalists play an important role in opinion-making and shaping public discourse, thus UNIFEM hoped to expose journalists and media institutions to a form of long distance gender sensitization via the toolkit and its cover letters,

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[10] See "Protection of Women in Afghanistan," Gender Advocacy in Afghanistan, Volume 6, September 2005.

which explicitly described some of the toolkit's strategies and principles. Mixing irrefutable and uncontroversial gender arguments among more sensitive ones, following a line of argument from one issue to the next, and presenting different issues related to domestic violence in every volume, the toolkit worked to demonstrate principles of solid argumentation and persuasion by example and also point journalists in the direction of helpful resources on gender issues.

Linking with community groups and movements

As a final, opportunistic strategy, UNIFEM linked its toolkit messages with civil society events and movements where possible. The first congress of the Afghan Midwifery Association allowed that month's toolkit to present information on maternal health in line with the congress' main concerns. A demonstration organized by Afghan women civil society organizations decrying honor killings allowed UNIFEM, with the permission of the demonstration organizers, to distribute an excerpt of the toolkit to participants and media at the demonstration that listed Sharia and Afghan laws prohibiting vigilante behavior and informal justice mechanisms.[11]

Emergent concerns

The media's efforts to raise awareness of domestic violence has generally been influenced by the weak and corrupt condition of Afghanistan's judicial and law enforcement systems. At best, the justice system has had limited success in penalizing violence against women. At worst, it has found rape victims guilty of adultery or detained runaway girls and women in jail where they have been abused by prison guards. The reach of the formal justice system has been mostly limited to the major cities in Afghanistan, leaving village councils, institutions with track records of violating women's rights, as the main mechanisms for law and order in Afghanistan's 80% rural landscape.

Village councils as informal judicial institutions have not protected women adequately and have been prone to exacerbate matters with impunity, offering a veneer of legitimacy to violent acts against women through blaming the victim or promoting customary practices detrimental to women's safety and health. There have been efforts to address the deficiencies of the official justice system and outlaw village-level customary practices. Given its limitations in reach, resources, and legitimacy, however, the central government will be unable to adequately challenge the existence of informal systems of law and order for some time.

In some ways, the media has been used to compensate for the central government's limited judicial and enforcement mechanisms. Insecurity and poor infrastructure in rural Afghanistan have discouraged development agencies from having a significant physical

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[11] See "Customary Laws in Afghanistan," Gender Advocacy in Afghanistan, Volume 2, May 2005.

presence outside of Kabul or other major urban centers. As a consequence, the radio – a cheap, battery-operated and accessible medium without literacy requirements – has been a central vehicle for extending development efforts and disseminating messages on voting and the political process across the country. Extension of the central government's judicial framework has followed a similar logic, with the texts of legal documents such as the Afghan Constitution and/or laws regarding, for example, marriage registration or the minimum age of marriage, being broadcast to rural areas. These broadcasts have intended to spread information that would present opportunities for self-regulation or lend weight and authority to negotiations for practices more in line with the central government's legal frameworks in areas otherwise inaccessible to the formal justice system.

The main concern emerging from such notions of justice by media proxy, however, has been that women in abusive situations would suffer a double burden, becoming aware of the degree to which their rights were being violated, yet having no adequate recourse for escaping their situation. In some cases, as with the issue of women's suicide by self-immolation, investigative journalism has raised the profile of women's domestic circumstances to a national level and sparked government inquiries into the circumstances surrounding women's lives. More generally, however, in the seclusion of purdah and with the absence of an effective judicial system, escalation of the profile of domestic violence via the media may well have adverse consequences for women's psychological wellbeing.

While lack of resources often limit audience research activities, there is a clear imperative for careful monitoring and evaluation of media campaigns on gender given the potential for unintended and detrimental outcomes, particularly on sensitive concerns such as domestic violence. Unfortunately, UNIFEM did not investigate the effect of its toolkit strategy. While feedback from recipients of the toolkit was positive, there was inadequate monitoring of Afghan media output to determine the degree to which the information presented in the toolkits was adopted by journalists and passed on to the general public, and no audience research to determine the consequences, both positive and negative, of the general public's reception of the toolkit's information. UNIFEM collaborated with Afghan National Television, a television station based in Kabul, to co-produce a brief video program called "Why Violence?"[12] that was catalyzed by UNIFEM's gender advocacy toolkit. Aside from this initiative, however, there is little information on the outcomes, impact, and constructiveness of UNIFEM's media strategy.

This case study concludes that UNIFEM's media strategy on domestic violence presents an example of a media intervention designed with care and sensitivity to the context it inhabited, but that lack of evaluation presents a major flaw in the approach that will need to be addressed if the strategy is to be analyzed effectively or employed further.

Final thoughts

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[12] The "Why Violence?" video is available at http://afghanistan.unifem.org/publication.htm

Women in Afghanistan are certainly not a homogeneous group. Their problems are multifaceted and varied, and deserving of equally multifaceted and varied solutions. Domestic violence, as a global concern cutting across race, age, and class, presents dilemmas and challenges in the Afghan context which require comprehensive and coordinated effort to resolve. At the national level, there must be due diligence on the part of the state to end impunity and prosecute effectively, establish preventative measures against violence, and systematize protective structures such as shelters, legal counselling, trained female police officers, and emergency systems to respond to urgent situations. Afghanistan's first Family Intervention Unit, based in a police station in Kabul, was launched in 2005 and an Interministerial Task Force to Eliminate Violence Against Women now coordinates action and policy regarding violence against women across government ministries. A database to track national statistics on violence against women was also launched this year to identify gaps in strategies and service provision. Prospects for Afghan women are improving slowly and unevenly, but noticeably.

Media campaigns, as one level of intervention in the problem of domestic violence, are limited to the realm of persuasion, notification, and rhetoric, and further constrained by the media's reach and the public's access to radio sets, televisions, or literacy skills. The power of the media lies in the intangible rather than the institutional, in recreating the boundaries of what is permissible, and instilling questions about existing norms. The ephemeral nature and shifting multiple meanings of public discourse make the impact of media interventions hard to measure. However, in the longterm, it may well be the power of the media - predicated on the assumption that domestic violence, as a cause and indication of suffering within intimate and hidden worlds, is most effectively brought to the surface with tact, sensitivity, and compassion - that helps shift changes in societal norms regarding domestic violence from surface practices to deep values.

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