



# Target assistance to families with the least access to diverse, better-paying jobs

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## About the Authors

**Paula Kantor** is AREU's Senior Research Manager for livelihoods and gender and a lecturer at the School of Development Studies at the University of East Anglia in the UK. Her research specializations include urban poverty and vulnerability, informal labour markets and gendered analyses of access to and outcomes of employment. **Stefan** managed AREU's urban livelihoods project from 2004-2006. At present, he serves as Team Leader of a project on land policy and administrative reform, jointly implemented by DFID, ADB and Afghanistan's Ministry of Agriculture and Irrigation.

## Overview

Inadequate access to employment is a major source of vulnerability for the urban poor in Afghanistan and a likely source of political instability for the state.<sup>1</sup> The degree of vulnerability, however, varies based on the worker's age, gender, and disability status. Such factors, in many cases, determine the type of work available to individuals and families and, consequently, their income. Thus, the security of families depends on which household members – male, female, child, disabled – are available to join the labour force.

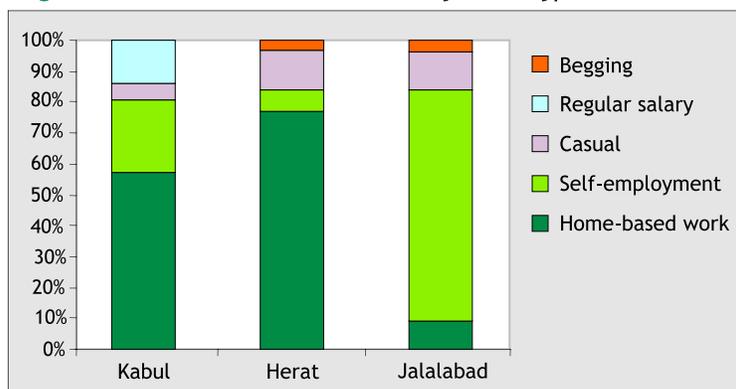
This Policy Note examines the level of income different household members can earn, how this affects labour mobilisation strategies, and in turn, how such labour deployment patterns impact long-term livelihood security. Families which have no able-bodied male to rely on for labour are the ones with the least access to better-paying jobs and therefore comprise the most vulnerable group. This was one of the key findings of a longitudinal research conducted by the **Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit (AREU)** on urban livelihoods in three cities.<sup>2</sup> This paper puts forth policy recommendations (see page 4) that acknowledge the complexities around family dynamics and how they determine who works and income earned. It also points out that assistance toward urban livelihood security must be targeted to those least able to access decent quality work.<sup>3</sup>

## Women and children: Active participants in the urban labour market

Across study sites, women make up a considerable share of reported incidences of work among the study sample. However, there is also much variation across sites in the extent to which women work. The percent of work incidences involving females range from a low of 15 percent in Jalalabad, to 27

percent in Kabul, and to a high 43 percent in Herat. Thus, Herat seems to offer women more work opportunities, particularly concentrated in home-based work (Figure 1), followed by Kabul with a similar concentration in home-based activity. Jalalabad has much lower female employment in general but

Figure 1: Female work incidences by work type



<sup>1</sup> See Kantor, P. and S. Schütte, 2006, *Informal Employment and Urban Livelihood security in Afghanistan*, Kabul: AREU.

<sup>2</sup> Long-term research funded by the EC followed 40 households each in the cities of Herat, Kabul and Jalalabad. For more information on the methodology and objective of this research, see Beall, J. and S Schütte, 2006, *Urban Livelihoods in Afghanistan*, Kabul: AREU.

<sup>3</sup> Data were collected about disability at the household level only (household has a disabled member or no) and not at the individual level. Therefore, individual outcomes of work cannot be reported by disability status.

**Table 1. Median daily earnings (Afghanis)<sup>4</sup>**

	Females	Males	Children	Adults
Kabul	60	90	57	98
Herat	27	100	48	80
Jalalabad	90	120	100	120

greater concentration in self-employment; however this work is often done in a home environment (beauty salon, washing clothes, tailoring), either the woman’s or the employer’s.

Children under 18 also compose a large share of work incidences in the sample, particularly in Kabul where their share of all work incidences is 42 percent, compared to 28 percent in Herat and 22 percent in Jalalabad. Children are less obviously concentrated in a particular work type than women are (Figure 2), though most are found in casual work and self-employment. Boys are more likely than girls to work, though the percent of school-aged boys and girls working is most similar in Herat (56 percent of boys and 35 percent of girls). Otherwise, in Kabul 10 percent of girls and 48 percent of boys in the study households work. In Jalalabad only two percent of girls work, while 44 percent of boys are in the workforce.

These data provide some indication of the extent of women’s and children’s participation in urban labour markets in Afghanistan, and how they tend to be segregated into selected work types, particularly for women. The relatively high reliance on female and child labour, particularly in Kabul and Herat, illustrate as well the importance of these workers to labour mobilisation patterns among the study households. However, the limitations of relying on these workers are clear from their considerably lower earnings relative to adult men. As Table 1 illustrates, daily earnings for both women and children are less than men’s, and in Herat and Jalalabad children earn more than females. Overall, these data show that over-reliance

**Table 2. Mean share of workers in the household (HH):**

Share of workers	Overall	Female head of HH	No male labour	Member with disability	Half or more of workers are children
Kabul	.27	.36	.21	.17	.33
Jalalabad	.25	.25	.13	.23	.25
Herat	.38	.49	.24	.41	.38

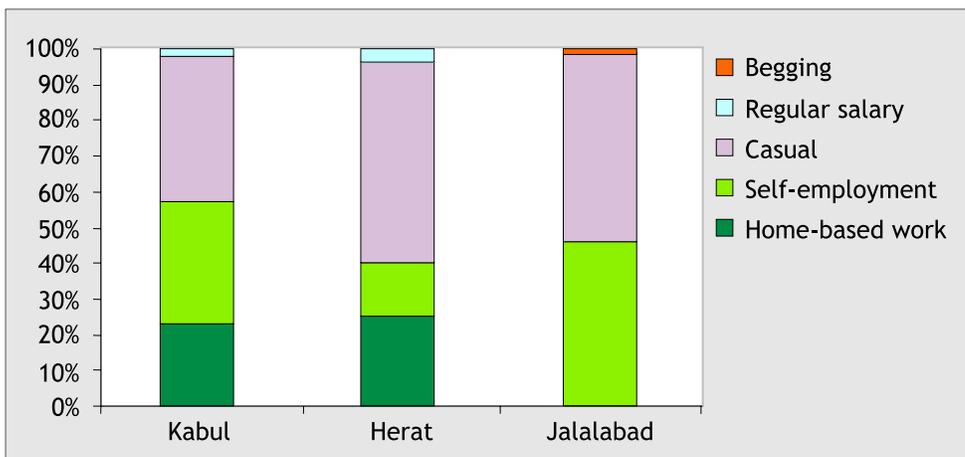
on women and children as workers is a sign of vulnerability since their access to diverse types of work and earnings from work are considerably less than men’s. This finding is confirmed in the next section, which provides household level data on the outcomes of labour mobilisation patterns.

**Families with no male workers: Most vulnerable among urban poor**

How households use labour changes throughout the year. Figure 3 illustrates this through the example of how one Jalalabad household both employed different members at different times across the study period, as well as often changed the number of total workers, depending on need and opportunity.<sup>5</sup> Peak season for work was between August and October, during which time the entire household migrated to a rural site to participate in agricultural wage labour, putting as many members as possible to work in order to earn maximum income. Over the year, the head of the household, who suffers from a physical disability, infrequently worked for an income, whereas many of his male children were busy all year round.

This is not an unusual case in relation to both the movement of women and children in and out of work, as well as dependence on child labour. Thus, while some households can move children and

**Figure 2: Child work incidences by work type**



<sup>4</sup> \$1 = 49.5 Afs (short for Afghanis).

<sup>5</sup> Note that there are no data for May due to insecurity in Jalalabad and the inability to conduct field work.

**Table 3.** Median monthly per capita household income levels (Afghanis)

Median monthly incomes in:	Overall	No access to male labour	Female head	Male head	Member with a disability	No member with a disability	Half or more of workers are children
Kabul	409 Afs	111 Afs	435 Afs	403 Afs	260 Afs	446 Afs	453 Afs
Herat	640 Afs	327 Afs	749 Afs	610 Afs	481 Afs	678 Afs	693 Afs
Jalalabad	543 Afs	294 Afs	438 Afs	551 Afs	500 Afs	570 Afs	543 Afs

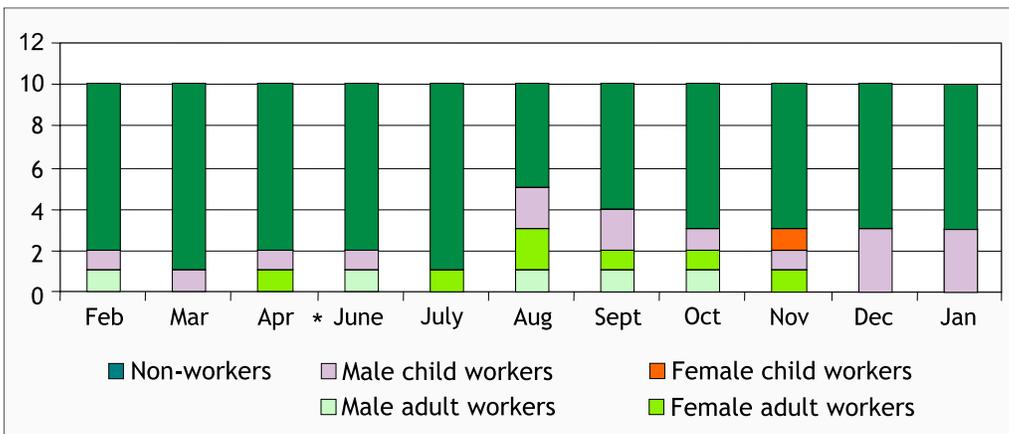
females into work when crisis hits, others are more dependent on female and child labour as main sources of income. These latter households are assumed to be more prone to income poverty and its associated risks. Evidence in Tables 2 and 3 supports this risk for families dependent on female labour, but not for those with high shares of child workers. Households with children composing more than half of workers have a similar share of total workers in the household as the overall sample, and earn the same if not more in per capita monthly income as the overall sample. Relying significantly on child labour in Afghan cities does not necessarily raise the risk of income poverty, but it does have other attendant risks related to the children's ability to build human capital through education. Thus, while providing income security today, child labour may lead to greater risks of income poverty in the future for the children and their own families.

A very different story can be told for households dependent on female labour (i.e. no access to adult male labour). They have the lowest share of workers in the household (most dependents) apart from households with disabled members in Kabul, and earn significantly less per capita monthly income than the overall sample or any other sub-group. Their lower earnings relate to women's limited mobility in Afghanistan, and hence constrained choice of work activities, as noted above, as well as the relations of production which often characterise home-based work, particularly those conducted through sub-

contracting arrangements. Such relations have generally been found to put more power in the hands of the contractors, who may supply inputs as well as buy final products, and hence control the profitability of the work for the women.<sup>6</sup>

It is important to clarify the difference in outcomes between households without access to able-bodied adult male labour and female-headed households. The latter may well have male workers, placing them in a superior income position relative to the former group. Thus, assistance programmes targeting vulnerable women as a beneficiary group, particularly those heading their households, may not reach the intended aim of reducing poverty or vulnerability. As Table 3 shows, in AREU's study sample, only female-headed households in Jalalabad earned less per capita monthly income than the overall sample, with female-headed households earning the same if not more than the overall sample median in the other cities. Much greater care is needed in targeting assistance to the vulnerable.

Households in the study sample with a disabled member earn less income compared to households without a disabled member, or the overall study sample. This does not relate so much to having fewer workers in the household, except in Kabul, but to the workers' earnings levels. Thus, households with disabled members, as well as families without access to male labour, are better approximations of "the vulnerable" for aid delivery, than female-headed households.

**Figure 3:** Labour mobilisation strategy of one household in Jalalabad

<sup>6</sup> See Kantor, Paula, 2003, "Women's Empowerment through Homebased Work: Evidence from India," *Development and Change* 34(3): 425-445; Carr, M., Chen, M.A., & Jhabvala, R. 1996, *Speaking out: Women's economic empowerment in South Asia*, London: IT Publications; Beneria, L. & Roldan, M. 1987, *The crossroads of class and gender: Industrial homework, subcontracting and household dynamics in Mexico City*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

\*Research could not be conducted in May due to security issues.

# RECOMMENDATIONS

This Policy Note shows how vulnerability to income poverty relates to labour market access, and how the relationship is more complex than having a female head. It is more about who works and their access to labour markets – with lack of access to able-bodied male labour making a household most vulnerable to poverty, even compared to those households highly dependent on child labour. Disability is a significant factor, particularly in relation to access to income versus the ability to mobilise labour within the household. To address inequalities in labour market access and reduce income poverty, the following are proposed:

- 1. Improve work opportunities for adults to reduce dependence on child labour in the medium and long term by creating better quality employment opportunities in the informal and formal economy.\***
- 2. Child labour is central to household survival. In the short term, look for creative ways to facilitate work and schooling for children.**
  - Build on actions already occurring in the Afghan context to enable movement of smaller scale projects to a larger scale.
  - Examine best practice in other complementary contexts to develop new and innovative means of enabling children's work and human capital investments.
  - Ensure schools have relevant curricula, and quality of schooling is sufficiently high to motivate household investment in children's education.
- 3. Changes in women's opportunities to work outside of the home are unlikely to happen in the short or even medium term. Therefore, conditions within home-based work need to be improved.**
  - Conduct research to investigate ways to improve women's position and power within value chains in sectors where they currently work, increasing their control over production and marketing.
  - Develop strategies to reduce the burden of household chores that normally falls on women, giving them more time for paid work. One strategy is improving access to basic services, such as water and electricity.
  - Organise women to increase their bargaining power with employers or sub-contractors. This will be challenging in the Afghan environment, so lessons should be learned from similar contexts where women's mobility outside of the home is limited (Turkey, Egypt, Pakistan). Donors need to support NGOs in this work, avoiding a project orientation to their funding.
- 4. Attitudes must also change to increase the acceptability of women working in general and their employment outside of the home. Such changes are required among both women and men.**
  - Extend existing efforts to provide women skills in non-traditional activities, which may not be already "gendered" and valued less than male activities.
- 5. Improve the poverty reduction outcomes of development interventions through more careful targeting of beneficiaries.**
  - Conduct research to document how and how much women contribute to urban livelihoods. Identify constraints which limit this contribution and illustrate how reducing such constraints can lead to more equitable development and reductions in poverty.
- 6. Improve assistance to disabled people to increase their households' livelihood security. This supports the achievement of a related benchmark within the Afghanistan Compact.**
  - Develop more nuanced criteria defining "vulnerable groups" that go beyond female-headed households. This includes adjusting the high level benchmark on gender under the social protection pillar which aims to improve conditions for vulnerable females, but, is at times, inaccurately conflated with female-headed households.
  - Improve the ability of disabled members to contribute to household income, as feasible, through targeted skills development and job placement programmes.
  - For the disabled who are unable to work, improve the implementation and outreach of existing social protection programmes and consider ways to extend them to improve livelihood security among these households.

\* See AREU's related Policy Note recommending to: "Create more quality jobs with regular pay to improve livelihoods and political stability."