



# Made by Afghan Women

Concept Note





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## Message from Deputy Minister Kamila Sidiqi



The situation for Afghan businesswomen has improved remarkably over the last two decades. As someone who's start as an entrepreneur began in clothing production under the Taliban regime and spread to many different industries since then, I can say that Afghan women have so many more opportunities now than I did. This is especially the case since President Ashraf Ghani made the private sector and women's economic empowerment a major priority in his agenda. Besides the President, Her Excellency the First Lady has been an enormous source of support for the betterment of Afghan women, to include in the economic sphere.

While the situation for aspiring Afghan businesswomen may have improved dramatically, that is not to say that we now have a level playing field. Afghan women continue to struggle with conservative social expectations in which they face pressure to focus on household duties. For those Afghan women who are committed to launching and operating a

business, simple tasks like meeting with suppliers and buyers can be a struggle. For example, male relatives must be recruited to come along as chaperones, considering the cultural taboo against women moving alone outside the home.

When it comes to conducting sales trips abroad to meet potential international buyers, this is simply out of the question; not only because of the cultural taboos, but also because most Afghan women are operating small and medium-sized enterprises with insufficient cash on hand to budget such trips.

For these reasons, Afghan women continue to require institutional support on the road to gender equity in the private sector. The Made by Afghan Women initiative is one such form of institutional support – overseen by the Afghan Government's Ministry of Commerce and Industries in collaboration with the Afghanistan Women Chamber of Commerce and Industry (AWCCI) and other government and non-government partners – that will help Afghan businesswomen contribute even further to the financial stability of their households, the advancement of their nation's economy, and the reputation of Afghan products around the world. I believe in AWCCI's mandate and am thankful for the support provided by His Excellency the President and First Lady Rula Ghani for its establishment. I am very optimistic about the prospects of Afghan women in the private sector in the years ahead, and believe that the AWCCI leadership will contribute to this bright future.

Kamila Sidiqi  
Deputy Minister, Commerce  
Ministry of Commerce and Industries

## Message from AWCCI President Manizha Wafeq

Having spent the last 12 years as a trainer for Afghan businesswomen with the PEACE THROUGH BUSINESS® program, and two years working closely with Afghan businesswomen as President of the Afghanistan Women Chamber of Commerce and Industry, I know how talented and resourceful our women entrepreneurs and business owners are. They are true pioneers in their communities, breaking down stereotypes of what a women's place in society should be and serving as role models for our daughters (including my own!).

As much as Afghan businesswomen have been able to accomplish in the last 15 years, they still face long odds of success; Afghanistan's post-war economy is tough for all businesses, while many institutional and social obstacles for Afghan businesswomen persist.

As part of its mandate to support Afghan businesswomen, the AWCCI has pushed forward the development of the Made by Afghan Women (MBAW) labelling initiative to draw attention to the work of Afghan women who have invested their time, energy, and (often limited) capital to develop a product and introduce it to the market.

In an era where consumers have a seemingly unlimited array of choices for what products they wish to buy, we hope that the MBAW label will be able to catch the attention of shoppers (and large-scale distributors/retailers) who support the cause of Afghan women in business.

Individually, Afghan women running small and medium-sized enterprises have enormous difficulties penetrating international markets. We hope that as part of the Made by Afghan Women collective, with marketing support provided by AWCCI and our partners in the Afghan Government, we will be able to boost the sales of these women-owned businesses and help them reach their true potential.

Manizha Wafeq  
President  
Afghanistan Women Chamber of Commerce and Industry

THE MBAW INITIATIVE WILL  
HELP DRAW ATTENTION  
TO THE WORK OF AFGHAN  
WOMEN WHO ARE BRINGING  
PRODUCTS TO THE MARKET



## Introduction

### Why Launch a Labelling Initiative for Afghan Women-Made Products?

In the introduction of this concept document, Deputy Minister Kamila Sidiqi touched on a number of factors that inspired the development of the Made by Afghan Women (MBAW) labelling initiative.

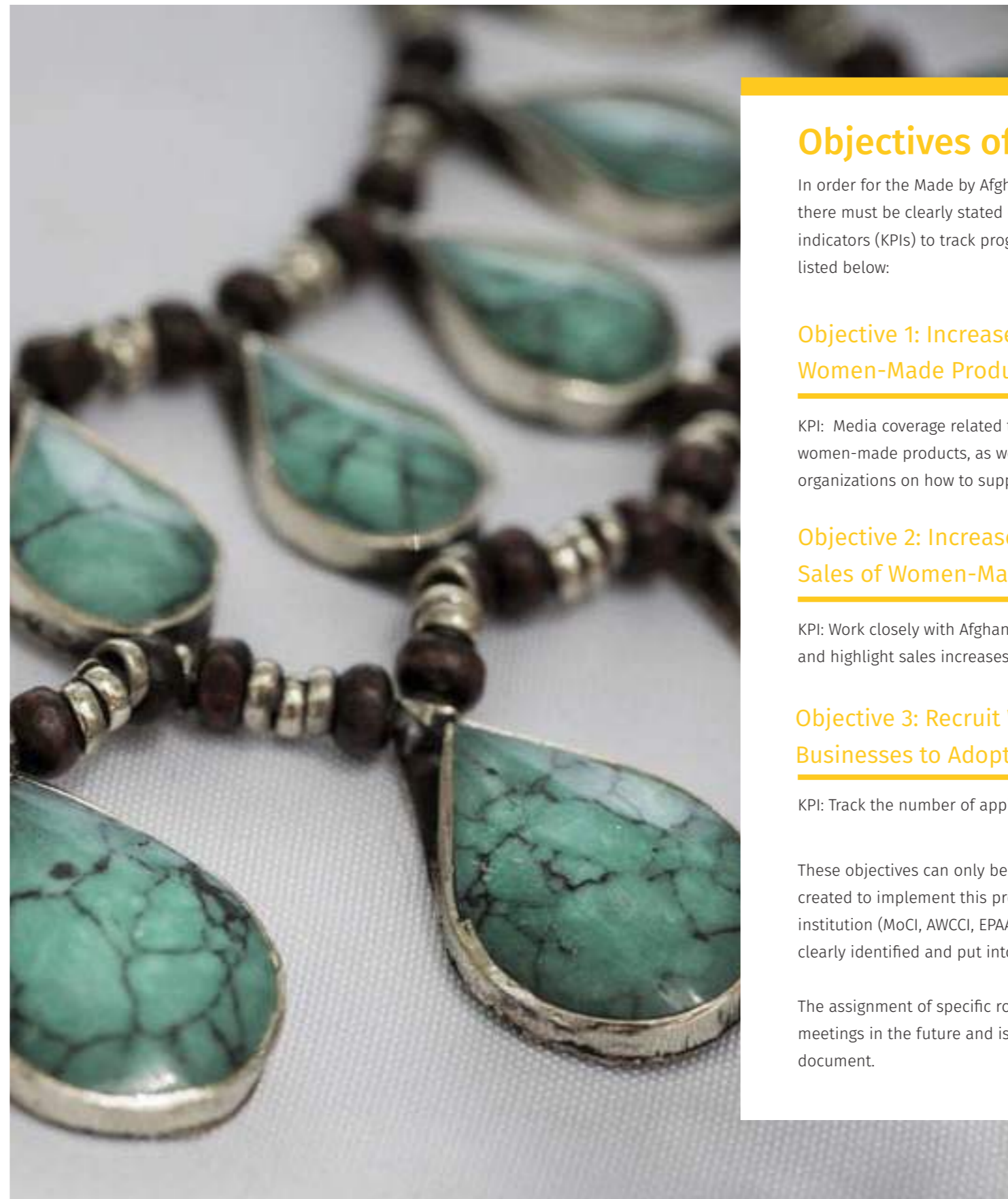
Speaking from her deep experience in the Afghan private sector, Ms. Sidiqi listed various challenges that Afghan businesswomen face. These include societal expectations that dissuade Afghan women from entering business, cultural taboos that limit the movement of Afghan women outside the home, and the small and medium-sized nature of most women-owned businesses with little available cash for marketing activities or international sales trips.

Besides addressing societal and cultural disadvantages that Afghan women have faced and continue to face, the MBAW initiative has the potential to boost Afghan exports at a time when stakeholders from the Afghan public and private sectors, along with Afghanistan's supporters in the international community, have all come together to improve Afghanistan's trading prospects

and increase the visibility of Afghan products in global markets. While international media attention may have turned to other parts of the world, there is still considerable interest in both the East and the West in the situation of Afghan women. A labelling initiative will allow major international wholesalers and retailers to identify and prioritize the purchase of Afghan women-made products.

In developed markets, high-income consumers are increasing conscientious about where and how the things they buy are produced. At the well-stocked shelves of retailers that cater to these very same high-income consumers, an identifying mark that attracts the buyer's attention could be enough to influence a purchasing decision.

Another reason for the Made by



### Objectives of MBAW Initiative

In order for the Made by Afghan Women initiative to be successful, there must be clearly stated objectives and key performance indicators (KPIs) to track progress. These objectives and KPIs are listed below:

#### Objective 1: Increase Visibility of Afghan Women-Made Products

KPI: Media coverage related to the MBAW initiative and Afghan women-made products, as well as inquiries from donor organizations on how to support MBAW-certified businesses.

#### Objective 2: Increase Both Foreign & Domestic Sales of Women-Made Products

KPI: Work closely with Afghan women-owned businesses to identify and highlight sales increases and success stories.

#### Objective 3: Recruit Women-Owned/Operated Businesses to Adopt the MBAW Label

KPI: Track the number of applications to AWCCI for certification

These objectives can only be achieved if a strong framework is created to implement this program. The role of each partner institution (MoCI, AWCCI, EPAA, MoWA, MoFA, and ANSA) must be clearly identified and put into writing.

The assignment of specific roles will take place in coordination meetings in the future and is beyond the scope of this concept document.

## MBAW At A Glance



### Why MBAW?

The Made by Afghan Women labelling initiative will help level the playing field for Afghan businesswomen, who face considerable social pressures and cultural taboos when launching a business.



### MBAW Objectives

The immediate objective for the MBAW initiative is to raise the international profile of Afghan women-made products, and thereby boost sales. The long-term objective is to contribute to increased Afghan exports and employment generation.



### Components of Certification

At the foundation of the MBAW initiative is a certification regime that will approve the use of the MBAW label. The certification criteria will be decided by the MBAW partners, led by the Ministry of Commerce and Industries and supported by the Afghanistan Women Chamber of Commerce and Industry and the Afghanistan National Standards Authority (ANSA).



### Promotion Strategy

MBAW-labelled products will be promoted through a number of channels. These channels include Afghanistan's foreign embassies and consulates, regional and international conferences and events, social media, and Afghan Government websites.

**THE KEY TO SUCCESS FOR THE MADE BY AFGHAN WOMEN INITIATIVE IS TO CREATE A FRAMEWORK FOR THE INITIATIVE TO MOVE FORWARD. THIS FRAMEWORK MUST INCLUDE THE DIVISION OF RESPONSIBILITIES AMONG PARTNERS, ACTIVITIES WITH KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS, AND A REALISTIC TIMELINE.**



Afghan Women labelling initiative is strength in numbers. If the partners behind the MBAW initiative can prepare an attractively designed catalogue of Afghan women-made products, it will be easier to approach large multi-national retail chains and present a slate of products. A small or medium-sized Afghan woman producer, on her own, would have little to no chance of presenting her product to these same retailers.

At a time when every international sale matters, this opportunity to boost exports should not be overlooked or underestimated.

The concept of a labelling initiative for Afghan women-made products was conceived by Afghan businesswomen who had spent time abroad and learned about the positive perception that such labels can have on consumers in developed markets. Through advocacy aimed at various Afghan Government ministries, along

with the executive branch, momentum for a labelling initiative grew.

In October 2016, the Made by Afghan Women initiative was introduced by the President of Afghanistan, Ashraf Ghani, at the Brussels Conference on Afghanistan. It was later formally put into writing in the Women's Economic National Priority Programme document, published in December 2016.

The MBAW initiative is led by the Afghan Ministry of Commerce and Industries (MoCI) and the Afghanistan Women Chamber of Commerce and Industry (AWCCI). The initiative cannot succeed, however, without critical support from the Export Promotion Agency of Afghanistan (EPAA), the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA), the Ministry of Women's Affairs (MoWA), and the Afghanistan National Standards Authority (ANSA).

## Background of Labelling Initiatives



Labelling initiatives consist of an identifying mark on a product that indicates that the item was produced with certain standards or values in mind. Each labelling initiative tends to focus on a single concern of socially conscious shoppers. The first widespread, successful labelling initiative, the Fairtrade label, was created in 1988 out of concern that coffee producers in developing economies were reaping relatively little reward for their labor, especially in comparison to enterprises further down the coffee value chain located in the developed world. Products with the Fairtrade label provided assurance to consumers that the coffee producers received a more equitable share of the profits of the coffee industry. The Fairtrade label can now be found on dozens of products that are cultivated or manufactured in the developing world.

Following the outpouring of consumer support for Fairtrade-labelled products, other labelling initiatives were devised to address concerns across a range of industries. A Dolphin Safe labelling initiative was

devised in 1990 for the tuna industry, to provide incentives (i.e. increased sales) to tuna processing companies to equip their fishing boats with nets that did not inadvertently entrap and drown dolphins. More relevant to Afghanistan, the GoodWeave labelling initiative was founded in 1994 to reduce the use of child labor in the rug-making industry. GoodWeave now has a physical office in Afghanistan that certifies Afghan carpets designated for foreign export.

The labelling initiative that serves as the most immediate inspiration for the MBAW partners is the Women Owned label. As with the MBAW initiative, the Women Owned label is the result of work from a number of partners, to include the Women's Business Enterprise National Council (WBENC), WEConnect International, and the American retail giant Walmart. Businesses with a majority share of women ownership (51% or more) can qualify to place a Women Owned label on their products, with thousands of these products placed on Walmart's shelves.

## MBAW Oversight and Certification

### Certification

A standards-oriented certification regime will help ensure that only high-quality products that truly support Afghan women will receive the MBAW label and be included in the MBAW catalogue.

While a wide range of meetings have already taken place for the purpose of developing the MBAW initiative, there remain many details related to certification that have not been finalized.

One area where further debate is required is the question of product ownership vs. product production. If a company is owned by an Afghan woman, but all the labor is male, it is reasonable to expect that the final products will still qualify for the MBAW label. But what about the reverse situation; a male company owner with a predominantly female workforce? This is very often the case for businesses involved in two of Afghanistan's major exports, saffron and hand-knotted carpets.

The MBAW partners may wish to provide MBAW certification to businesses with a majority female workforce, with an additional requirement that these businesses pay an established minimum wage and meet certain international workplace standards.

Besides the matter of product ownership vs. product production, there is the question of product quality; should MBAW-labelled products be held to a higher standard than 'regular' Afghan products? This question is especially relevant when considering that one of the goals of the MBAW initiative is to present a slate of Afghan women-made products to major international retailers like Walmart and Carrefour. If one MBAW-labelled product is of embarrassingly poor quality, it would reflect poorly on the entire product catalogue.

### MAJOR LABELLING INITIATIVES



FAIR TRADE LABEL



GOODWEAVE LABEL



DOLPHIN SAFE LABEL



WOMEN OWNED LABEL

### Regulation

A labelling initiative is only as strong as the institutions that regulate and certify the use of that label. Without tight regulation and a diligent certification process, the initiative is vulnerable to exploitation by business interests with little to no interest in the welfare of Afghan women.

With that in mind, the first question to ask is, 'What will happen if a company uses the MBAW label without being certified?' In order to create a legal framework to address such a possibility, the Ministry of Commerce and Industries may wish to first officially register this symbol with its own Intellectual Property registration agency.

The next step is establishing a series of protocols in the event that a company improperly uses the MBAW label. This would likely involve an initial 'Cease and Desist' order; if this is ignored, the Ministry of Commerce and Industries must be prepared to file a criminal complaint with the Office of the Attorney General.

# MBAW Promotion Strategy

## The MBAW Label

The first stage in the development of the MBAW promotion strategy was the design of the MBAW label itself. Six Afghan graphic designers were invited to submit sample designs for the label, with the designs reviewed by officials from the Ministry of Commerce and Industries (MoCI), the Afghanistan Women Chamber of Commerce and Industry (AWCCI), and Afghan businesswomen active in AWCCI activities.

After extensive deliberation, a design was finally selected in May 2018. At the foundation of the design is a 12-point star, maroon in color with a dark orange trim. The design features the text “Made by Afghan Women” in three languages (English, Dari, and Pashto), with the text also presented in a decorative kufic format in the center, in Dari.



## Target Audience

On a general level, the aim of the MBAW initiative is to generate attention about the important role of women in the Afghan economy. On a more tangible level, the initiative hopes to drive sales of Afghan women-made products, especially in higher-income developed economies where products can be sold at premium prices.

The target audience for the initiative can be classified into several groups, listed below:

- Large international retailers (e.g. Walmart and Carrefour)
- Large international buyers who distribute to smaller retailers
- Small and medium-sized retailers

If the initiative can also generate interest from donor agencies, in terms of support for businesses that have qualified for the MBAW label, this would also be a positive outcome.



# Communications Channels

There are a number of different communications channels through which the MBAW initiative can be promoted. These are detailed below, with brief additional notes regarding implementation:

## Foreign Missions

Afghan embassies and consulates could display MBAW-labelled products in reception areas and meeting spaces, along with promoting these products at business and cultural events.

## Press Releases

In order to increase the likelihood of the MBAW initiative coming up in online searches, all of the MBAW partners with websites should publish press releases describing the initiative and its objectives.



## Social Media

Facebook and Instagram pages should be set up, with human resources allocated to make posts on a regular basis (at least 3 times per week, if not every day). The pages can feature MBAW-certified products (with information on how to buy them!) and give updates on the initiative and how businesses can apply for certification.

## Trade Fairs

Afghanistan is very active now in trade-related conferences and trade fairs abroad. When the Ministry of Commerce and Industries is involved in planning for these events, there should be an active effort made to ensure that MBAW-certified businesses are included and/or promoted.

## Website

The MBAW partners can cooperate on the construction of a website to outline the initiative and provide a list of MBAW-certified products. This website can be modeled on [www.womenownedlogo.com/](http://www.womenownedlogo.com/).

## Project Timeline

Activity	Month 1	Month 2	Month 3	Month 4	Month 5	Month 6
Finalize application criteria for MBAW label	■					
Publish press releases on MBAW launch		■				
Start procurement for MBAW website		■				
Start procurement for MBAW print/promotional material		■				
Start procurement for MBAW photography		■				
Solicit applications for MBAW label		■				
Complete first round of MBAW application acceptances			■			
Conduct photo sessions of MBAW products and producers			■			
Start MBAW website development				■		
Start design process of MBAW print/promotional material				■		
Launch MBAW social media pages				■		
Publish press release on first products with MBAW labels				■		
Finalize MBAW promotional material designs					■	
Print MBAW promotional material					■	
Distribute MBAW material to Afghan foreign missions					■	
Start promotion of MBAW at Afghan foreign missions						■



## About the Afghanistan Women Chamber of Commerce and Industry

Since 2002, many non-profit organizations have started working for Afghan women's empowerment and rights. Almost all focused their activities and advocacy work on women's political, social, and cultural participation and rights. None were focused on the topic of women's economic participation or businesswomen's advocacy.

A group of Afghan businesswomen recognized this need and the lack of an advocacy platform to further their interests, so they collaborated and established Leading Entrepreneurs for Afghanistan's Development (LEAD). LEAD was established in 2013 and officially launched on 22 January 2014. It was registered with the Afghan Chamber of Commerce and Industries as a Businesswomen's Union. LEAD presented a proposal to the High Economic Council, chaired by the President Ashraf Ghani, to change the name to the Afghanistan Women Chamber of Commerce and Industry (AWCCI). LEAD's transition to become the AWCCI was approved by the High Economic Council of the Afghan Government on 12 March 2017.



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