



Gender Advocacy in Afghanistan

Upcoming Gender Events:

July 9-19:

- Fact finding mission of the UN Special Rapporteur on violence against women in Afghanistan.

July 7-August 27:

- The Academy for Educational Development Summer Speaker Series features a speech by a prominent woman every Sunday at 9AM. Contact Lisa Piper (lpiper@aed.org) for more information.

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Violence Against Women by Women

- In Afghanistan, men are often assumed to be the only perpetrators of violence against women.
- Unfortunately, there are many situations in which women are violent against other women too.
- New brides entering their husbands' homes can face significant psychological and physical abuse at the hands of their female in-laws.
- This violence is particularly virulent if the new bride is from a poorer family, married for love without the approval of the husband's family, or married as a result of *Bad* (custom of giving a female relative in marriage to the victim's family as settlement for a crime) or *Badal* (custom of giving a female relative away in marriage in return for a bride).
- Some brides respond with violence of their own once their stature strengthens.
- Co-wives' (*anbaq*) violence against each other can often be very harsh and appalling.
- The violence includes hurtful lies to discredit one another and abuse towards each other's children.
- Relations between step-



Photo: Mohd. Qasim

Violence against women by women

mothers and step-daughters, or between step-sisters can also be filled with conflict.

- If a woman remains childless, or was a widow or divorcee prior to remarrying, her female in-laws can be particularly cruel.

Forms of Violence Against Women by Women

- Violence against women by women often occurs within the household in Afghanistan.
- It often involves abuse of power in the relationships of family, trust, or dependency.
- Women's abusive behaviours include emotional abuse, psychological abuse, neglect, and physical assault.
- The abused woman can be assigned an excessive amount of household chores, be restricted from leaving the house (even to visit her own family), or face unfounded and continuous criticism of her work, clothing, or behaviour.
- Violence can also take a less direct form in malicious gossip that can isolate the abused woman socially or damage her family relationships.

Impacts of Violence Against Women by Women

- Women's violence against women, like all forms of violence, has many negative effects.
- In particular, the "domino effect" is possible, where original targets of violence, powerless to stop violence against themselves, abuse their power over other family members (e.g., children or elderly dependents).
- Children who witness family violence are often as severely affected as the direct victims.
- The household's health decreases with the anxiety, depression, anger and hostility, aggression, lowered self-esteem, social isolation and withdrawal caused by violence.
- Violent behaviours and attitudes are often learned and carried out by later generations of the family.



Photo: Ali Boyvat

Labourers waiting in a square in Kabul to be picked for daily work

According to the UNDP Global Human Development Report 2004, Afghanistan's per capita GDP (national income and output) of \$822 is the twelfth lowest out of 180 countries in the world



Photo: Ali Boyvat

An Afghan man working on making bricks

Men's Employment in Afghanistan

- Dismal livelihood prospects are one of the greatest threats to human security in Afghanistan. Despite new opportunities from donor investments and the return of people to their land, unemployment remains a pressing problem.
- Although precise statistics are unavailable, it is estimated that unemployment is as high as 2 million out of an estimated labour force of 8 million.
- While the recovery and reconstruction programme may result in the creation of 500,000 to 600,000 jobs, an employment gap of over a million jobs may remain. This could have serious consequences for peace-building and development.
- Creating adequate employment opportunities is critical to reducing the high levels of poverty among the majority of Afghans.
- Employment could help in restoring normalcy and building a stake in maintaining peace, and provide people, particularly young men, real alternatives to fighting.

This section has been adapted from Afghanistan National Human Development Report 2004: Security with a Human Face by UNDP Afghanistan

Employment conditions in Afghanistan

- Employment is a strong concern for men in Afghanistan, who bear the major responsibility for household income.
- Lack of computer and English skills can be a major obstacle to obtaining good employment, even for degree holders.
- Many job seekers also worry that nepotism and favoritism play a major role in hiring decisions, especially in government's ministries and local NGOs.
- In fact, in a recent Farsi BBC radio morning program, in response to the question of a radio listener, spokesperson of the Ministry of the Interior, Lotfollah Mashal, admitted that some government offices suffer from nepotism.
- Many men are forced to rely on informal or short-term work, waiting in squares to possibly be picked up by employers looking for a day's worth of work by a laborer.
- Even for those who hold jobs, life can be difficult, as wages are often not adequate to support their families.
- Civil servants' salaries are very low, from Afg.2000 to 4000 (\$40 to \$80) per month.
- Many Afghan men must hold two or more jobs at once to support their families.
- The return of thousands of Afghan refugees from Pakistan and Iran has further increased the number of jobseekers in the labour market.
- Tension over employment is such that skilled Pakistani daily labourers became the subject of a demonstration in Kabul recently by Afghan men concerned that Pakistanis were favoured over Afghan workers in the construction sector.
- For many Afghan men, injury at work can signal disaster, as hospital costs and loss of income can force their households into debt.

Some Statistics

- Unemployment in Afghanistan is estimated to be around 30 per cent.
- 30 percent of Afghans work part-time or in jobs for which they are overqualified.
- 80 percent are employed in agriculture.
- 18 percent are employed in services, mainly for low pay.
- According to the UNDP Global Human Development Report 2004, Afghanistan's per capita Gross Domestic Product (national income and output) of \$822 is the twelfth lowest out of 180 countries in the world.

Women as Financial Support in the Household

- In some Afghan households, women do what they can to contribute to the family's income.
- Women's income can be particularly important in families with high medical expenses and permanent disability or death of the main male income earner.
- Educated women are the highest income earners, working mostly as teachers, nurses, midwives, and government or office workers.
- An elite few work as judges, lawyers, businesswomen, and researchers.
- Less educated women can also help their families significantly while working as cleaners or cooks.
- Households in which women work for income are much stronger and more secure financially than those in which only males work.
- Families in which women have steady jobs and good employment skills have some form of insurance for times when sickness, death, or disaster strikes.
- However, in many areas women's movement is restricted because of security or the concern over what others might say.
- The need for a *mahram* (or male relative acting as protector) during travel in many areas of Afghanistan can prevent women from working outside of the house or community.
- In such cases, women often contribute to household wealth by working on handicrafts, carpet weaving, or working in the fields, but their income generation potential is sometimes not as strong.
- Women's income is often high enough that male children in the family can be sent to school instead of having to work to support the family.
- In such cases, the family has greater income generation potential in the longer term, as the educated boys can then earn more income and enjoy more community respect than boys who have less education.



Photo: UNIFEM

Most women seek jobs as cleaners, gatekeepers, and cooks.

Households in which women work for income are much stronger and more secure financially than those in which only males work.

International and Afghan Law on the Right to Work

- A number of national and international laws protect the rights of Afghan men and women in working and providing for their families.
- **Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan (Article 48):**
 1. Work is the right of every Afghan. Working hours, paid holidays, right of employment and employee, and other related affairs are regulated by law. Choice of occupation and craft is free within the limits of law.
 2. Everyone, without any discrimination, has the right to equal pay for equal work.
- **United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Article 23):**
 1. Everyone has the right to

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Photo: UNIFEM

Educated women can play a vital role in family and society.



Afghan girls sitting before computers at Kabul University

Photo: Reuters

Women's Higher Education in Afghanistan

- Afghanistan needs more women degree holders in order to rebuild the country and inject qualified and skilled female workers in all sectors of society.
- Unfortunately women in Afghanistan have limited access to higher education.
- According to the UNDP Human Development Report (HDR) only 1 out of 300 women in Afghanistan has had higher education. In contrast, 1 out of 5 women in Iran has higher education.
- Women in rural areas and poor women face enormous social and physical obstacles or constraints in accessing higher education.
- In Afghanistan, there are 17 higher education institutions. Eleven are universities with 4 located in Kabul. The remaining six are pedagogical (teaching) institutions.
- The proportion of students in these institutes in 2004 was 19.1% females and 81% males.
- In comparison, the proportion of female university students in Iran was over 50%.
- In 2004, the number of female teachers in Afghan higher educational institutes was 222 out of 1846 (12.0%).

The Need for Females in Higher Education in Afghanistan

- Without qualified female university-graduates, Afghanistan will continue to suffer, especially in areas such as female health and education that require a female work force.
- As female education rises, fertility, population growth, and infant and child mortality fall and family health improves.
- Increasing the number of qualified female teachers is essential to increasing the enrollment of girls in schools and providing them with positive female role models.
- Female university-graduates earn higher wages and thus can better support their families economically.
- Educated mothers are better equipped to raise responsible and healthy children.
- A highly educated female population can secure a strong work force and boost the production and wealth of the country.
- With a highly educated female population, parliament, cabinet and other social and political pillars of society can enjoy stronger female representation.
- Children — especially daughters — of educated mothers are more likely to be enrolled in school and to have higher levels of educational attainment.
- Educated women are better informed about the laws of Islam as well as their legal and political rights.

As female education rises, fertility, population growth, and infant and child mortality fall and family health improves

Some Statistics

- According to "Afghanistan: Rebuilding Our Nation" by the Islamic Transitional State of Afghanistan, the percentage of teachers who are female in selected universities and institutes is:
 1. Faryab Pedagogical: 33%
 2. Jauzjan Pedagogical: 26%
 3. Samangan Pedagogical: 21%
 4. Kabul: 15%
 5. Khost, Parwan Pedagogical, Nangarhar, Kabul Polytechnic, Alberoni: 0%
 6. Across Afghanistan: 12%
- The percentage of students who are female in selected universities and institutes:
 1. Kunduz: 67%
 2. Badakhshan Medical and Pedagogical: 66%
 3. Jauzjan Pedagogical: 54%
 4. Kabul: 14%
 5. Alberoni: 0.6%
 6. Kandahar, Khost: 0%
 7. Across Afghanistan: 19%
- Enrolment of females in different faculties:
 1. Language and Literature: 22%
 2. Teaching: 21%
 3. Medicine: 19%
 4. Natural Science: 12%
 5. Social Science: 7%
 6. Law and Political Science: 6%
 7. Theology: 3%
- According to the Afghanistan 2004 HDR, there is only one female professor with a Ph.D, out of 89.
- Boarding students at Balkh University: 1355 female, 3384 male.



New Dormitory in Kabul to House 1100 Female Students

Photo: Ali Bayrat

Barriers to Afghan Women Accessing Higher Education

- **Civil war:** More than two decades of insecurity have forced a generation of females to disrupt or set aside higher education.
- **Early marriage:** Many Afghan females marry at a very young age and cannot continue their education because of restrictions from their husbands' families or the additional responsibilities of childrearing.
- **Low value given to female education:** Lack of awareness of the benefits of study often causes families to reject female education. This rejection can change over time and education. For example, during the Soviet invasion one of the reasons many families left Afghanistan was to avoid compulsory schooling for girls. During the Taliban era, in contrast, teachers risked their lives to teach girls in underground schools and some families became refugees again to ensure a good education for girls.
- **Incorrect understanding of Islam:** Sometimes people use Islam as a justification for not allowing women to study. This is incorrect, as there is no prohibition of women's education in the Koran.
- **Safety and support needs:** Limited appropriate and secure housing for female students who live on campus and the lack of special support for women choosing to study after motherhood are of concern to some women and families.
- **Concern over marriage prospects:** Many families feel that overly educated girls are less easy to marry off, but in fact regardless of education level income is the determining factor in most arranged marriages.



Female university students

Photo: www.lookat.ch

“When the law and Islam don’t prevent women from getting an education, then families should also not prevent them.”

Lutfullah Abrahimi, Student of Islamic Law (Sharia), Kabul University

In the Words of Kabul University Students

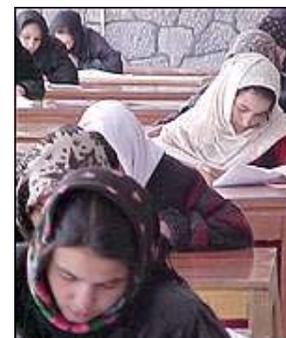
- “I think people’s attitudes and beliefs regarding girls’ higher education should be developed, and we should teach people about the rights of men and women.” *Javid Nekzad, Student of Law, Kabul University*
- “Lots of families think that after girls marry and give birth, they should sit at home and take care of their children. I think that the Ministry of Education should work to change the attitudes of people towards girls’ education.” *Homa Mihanpor, Student of Literature, Kabul University*
- “When the law and Islam don’t prevent women from getting an education, then families should also not prevent them. It is not true that girls should not continue their education after marriage.” *Lutfullah Abrahimi, Student of Islamic Law (Sharia), Kabul University*
- “If we read the Koran, there is not a single verse that prevents women from getting an education. The only things that bar females from education are our own outdated customs.” *Manizha Sadat, Student of English, Kabul University*

International and Afghan Law on the Right to Education

- **Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Article 26):** Everyone has the right to education. Higher education shall be equally accessible to all on the basis of merit.
- **Afghan Constitution (Article 43):** Education is the right of all citizens of Afghanistan....
- (Article 44): The state shall devise and implement effective programs for balancing and promoting of education for women, improving of education of nomads and elimination of illiteracy in the country.

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Female students during exam at Kabul University

Photo: news.bbc.co.uk



Photo: www.suipmchaos.com

Family planning is vital for the health of mother and child

Many Afghan women give birth too often and do not space their children, often leading to poor health, overcrowded conditions, higher poverty, or death of the mother and/or child.

Family Planning and Women's Health in Afghanistan

- In Afghanistan, family planning is vital for decreasing the rates of child and maternal mortality.
- Many Afghan women give birth too often and do not space their children, often leading to poor health, overcrowded conditions, higher poverty, or death of the mother and/or child.
- Afghan women and their families need family planning to better cope with poverty and unstable finances, feed family members properly and give children access to education.
- Unfortunately, most women and men in Afghanistan have no or very little knowledge of family planning.
- Many women (some having already given birth 8 or 9 times) do not want any more children but do not know what to do.
- These women might already be suffering health problems from undergoing too many pregnancies to give birth safely.
- They might also feel that they have become too old to have a healthy pregnancy.
- As women age, they are more likely to contract high blood pressure or diabetes for the first time during pregnancy.
- They are also more likely to give birth to a child with birth defects and developmental disability.
- Older women have an increased chance of suffering a miscarriage or still-born.
- Older mothers and fathers also have less energy to cope with the sleeplessness and stress of caring for a newborn baby.
- Many couples turn to abortion to terminate unwanted pregnancies, but unsafe abortion is also a major problem and a main contributor to maternal mortality in Afghanistan.

Benefits of Family Planning

- Family planning helps save women's and children's lives and preserves their health by preventing untimely and unwanted pregnancies, reducing women's exposure to the health risks of childbirth and abortion and giving women more time to care for their children and themselves.
- It helps couples and individuals decide freely and responsibly the number and spacing of their children.
- Family planning allows parents to give their children the best chance possible for the nourishment and nurturing they need before another child is born.
- Spacing is also important for the health of the child's mother and the harmony and financial health of the family unit.
- Family planning can expand life choices for the whole family. Postponing early childbirth through family planning allows newly married brides and grooms some time to work and save money to support the family, or finish their studies and thus have higher potential for earning money.
- Family planning can also mean that parents who have become too old to provide for their children do not put a double burden on the shoulders of the main income earners in the household.
- Those countries in the developing world that have invested in health and education and have provided women access to family planning and reproductive health programs have experienced faster economic growth than those that have not.
- When couples can choose the number, timing and spacing of their children, they are better able to ensure there are enough resources for each family member to prosper and thrive.
- Their children do not experience the cycle of poverty of their parents. Communities thrive, and in turn, countries fair better.
- A healthy environment is vital to ensuring the health of our families, and vice versa. Rapid population growth can result in using up the environment's resource- the trees, the water, and the wildlife- more quickly than they are replaced.
- The UN international conference on human rights, held in Tehran in 1968, declared: "Parents have a basic human right to determine freely and responsibly the number and spacing of their children."



Photo: www.incworldwide.org

A mother with her newborn child in Rabia Balkhi Hospital in Kabul, Afghanistan

This section has been adapted from USAID and UNFPA Family Planning Programs— http://www.usaid.gov/our_work/global_health/pop/popfaq.html and http://www.unfpa.org/icpd/10icpd_fd.htm

Some Family Planning Methods

- There are a number of methods for controlling when a woman will become pregnant.
- Use of modern contraceptive methods like male and female sterilization, the intra-uterine device, the pill, injectables, hormonal implants, condoms and female barrier methods is not very high in Afghanistan, but is growing.
- Couples can visit health clinics for more information about any of these methods.
- There are also a number of natural methods of family planning that couples who are poor or far from health workers can use.
- The lactational method is very simple, and only involves a mother breastfeeding her newborn child for 6 months after pregnancy.
- The mother will not become pregnant in those six months as long as:
 1. The baby is less than six months old.
 2. The baby is exclusively fed breast milk and does not have any other food.
- 3. The baby is fed at least every 4 hours in the daytime every 6 hours at night.
- 4. The mother had not yet had her first period.
 - This method is not always reliable, however.
 - Men can also decrease the likelihood of their wives becoming pregnant by withdrawing before ejaculation during sexual intercourse.
 - This is not a very reliable method of birth control, but it requires no equipment and is still better than nothing.
 - There are several other methods of birth control that depend on knowing when the woman is likely to ovulate.
 - Ovulation is when the woman's ovary releases an egg.
 - The most likely days to get pregnant are about 7 days before ovulation, until 1 or 2 days following ovulation.
 - These days are the "fertile" days, during which the couple should not have sex if they do not want the woman to become pregnant.
 - It is important to understand that:
 1. A woman produces an egg every month
 2. This egg is freed from the woman's ovary about 16 days before the woman's next period
 3. The egg remains alive for 24 hours (one day and one night) after being released from the ovary
 4. Male sperm (male eggs) can remain alive for 2 days inside women's bodies.
 - The couple should then only have sex in the period between the end of the "fertile" days and the woman's next period.
 - Health workers are best able to support a couple in determining which days are most likely to be "fertile" in the woman's monthly cycle.
 - However, a woman can also monitor her discharge as described by a health worker to determine which days are "fertile."
 - In general, couples should avoid sex or use a condom anytime that they are unsure whether it is an "fertile" day or not.

Advice on Spacing Children

- The family planning methods described above can be used to space the birth of children in Afghan families.
- Experts recommend 3-5 years as the optimal interval between births. Such spacing improves the well-being of the entire family.
- The advice suggests that:
 1. Children born at least three years apart are at significantly lower risk for illness and death in their first year of life and have a better chance of survival beyond their fifth year.
 2. Women who practice birth spacing are at lower risk of pregnancy- or childbirth related death and illness.
 3. Birth spacing allows for more attention and time for younger children during their developmentally critical first years, without decreasing the amount of time and energy spent on older children.

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- USAID and UNFPA family planning programs, http://www.usaid.gov/our_work/global_health/pop/popfaq.html and http://www.unfpa.org/icpd/10/icpd_fd.htm
- Where Women Have no Doctor, Hesperian Foundation.

For those mothers who want to complete their responsibility in time, they should breast feed their children for two years....

(Sura Baqara, verse 233- The Koran)

Experts recommend 3-5 years as the optimal interval between births. Such spacing improves the well-being of the entire family.



A mother cannot properly and responsibly take care of more than one child at the same time.

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This newsletter also available at
[Http://Afghanistan.unifem.org/
publication.htm](http://Afghanistan.unifem.org/publication.htm)



ABOUT THIS NEWSLETTER:

The Gender Advocacy in Afghanistan newsletter is produced by UNIFEM Afghanistan and distributed to 1000 journalists, media training centres, associations, institutions, as well as government, NGO, and UN agencies. The newsletter presents factual information, statistics, and references relevant to four different gender campaign issues in order to facilitate gender-based campaigns by Afghan journalists, government, and civil society organizations.

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Understanding the Afghan Constitution and Parliament

- **The Constitutional State Structure:** The constitution of Afghanistan established an “Islamic” “Democratic” “Republic”.
- “Islamic,” as the religion of the state is Islam and laws of the state should be in conformity with Islam.
- “Democratic,” as power is held by elected representatives.
- “Republic,” as sovereignty lies in citizens forming the nation, with the will of the citizens manifested directly by their elected representatives.
- In addition to these three basic principles of the state, the Constitution established a structure of a presidential system mixed with very strong parliamentary powers.
- Among the most important features of the presidential systems are:
 1. State authorities (Executive, Legislative and Judicial) are clearly separated.
 2. The head of state is the head of Government at the same time.
 3. The President is directly elected by the people.
 - We shall see these features below:
 - State authorities’ powers and duties:
 - **The President:** As the head of state, the President has special authorities in the executive, legislative and judicial fields. These powers are in addition to his full executive power as the head of Government.
 - The powers of the President as the head of state are mostly honorary and executive; the majority of effective head of state powers under the Afghan Constitution are shared with the National Assembly or “*Wolosi Jirga*.”
 - The Government (The Executive Authority):
 - The Government/Executive Authority is comprised of Ministers/Cabinet under the chairmanship of the President. Each Ministry shall be an administrative unit headed by the respective Minister.
 - Ministers can be appointed from amongst National Assembly members, only after such members lose their membership in National Assembly. They are replaced with other members in accordance with the Law. Note the clear separation between state authorities as a main feature of presidential systems.
 - Ministers are responsible/accountable to the President as their chairman and are politically responsible/accountable to the *Wolosi Jirga*.
 - The Judicial Authority is made up of the Supreme Court as the head of Judicial Authority in addition to courts of appeal (at the provincial level) and primary courts (at the district level), as well as special courts.
 - The power of the authority is to apply the Law in all kinds of cases viewed by the courts. The Jurisdiction of the Courts cover all cases filed by persons or institutions including the state as plaintiffs or defendants. No Law is allowed under any circumstance to exclude any case or area from the Jurisdiction of the judicial authority.

This section has been excerpted from Parliamentary Manual: Institutional and Legal Principles. The full manual is available in Dari, Pashto, and English from UNIFEM.