

## **Afghan Women Education: Bottlenecks & Future**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Afghanistan is a country with strong cultural norms and a male-dominated society, comprising 49% of women population. The plight of Afghan women is embedded in long history of the country. Decades old war has led 90% of Afghan women without education (aged 25). In war-torn countries around the world, thousands of women are deprived of education. The displacement and the predominance of norms or ideologies dampen the very idea of education for women. Most of the schools are far enough and the children, predominately the girls, have no easy access there. Girls do stay at home following the gender norms. However in post 2001, there have been significant developments regarding female education and their participation in public life. The most important contribution was the adoption of National Action Plan for the Women of Afghanistan (NAPWA<sup>1</sup>), 10 years strategic framework (2010-18). The paper argues that the girls' education in Afghanistan requires to be looked through the lens of culture. It will analyze the other barriers to women education and explore the facts how they are unequally treated in terms of access to all levels of education in the country. However, there is a long way to meet the challenges regarding women education. It will conclude with the idea that it is undoubtedly true that countries can develop where there is no gender discrimination with regard to education politics and social and economic rebuilding. Only gender-oriented tasks can rule out inequalities in conflict-affected societies and transform them into peaceful societies of respect and equality.

**Key Words:** National Action Plan for the Women of Afghanistan (NAPWA), International Human Rights Law, Afghan Constitution, Mujahideen, Taliban, Patriarchal Codes, Gender Norms

### **Introduction**

“Under the International Human Rights Law, everyone has the right to get free, compulsory, primary education and free from discrimination. The International Law also provides that secondary education shall be generally available and accessible to all” (<https://www.un.org/en/universal-declaration-human-rights/>).

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<sup>1</sup> The NAPWA is a central component of Afghanistan's effort to implement its commitments to women in an organized, systematic, coordinated and sustainable way. It aims to bring together short and long term measures that Government and its partners will pursue to advance women's status.

The United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) report illustrates that 25 million children between ages 6-15 are deprived of education in conflict zones in 22 countries.

Education is the basic fundamental right of every person and it is the duty of the state to safeguard, respect and accomplish the right to education. Education is not only important for personal development and growth but, in the long term, it has the power to transmute societies, yet it is often one of the first areas that suffer during conflicts. Contrary to the thinking and traditions of old days, today a girl's education is as important as those of boys. The education of a girl can bring a silent revolution in societies because it is the education of generations. It is one of the most precarious areas for the empowerment of women which largely deals in lessening the gender disparities eventually. The societies when given the social and political equality get improved with the passage of time. Over recent decades, the girls' education has witnessed remarkable progress across the globe. The education of women has gained momentum and global attention, emphasizing to offer access to girls and women (Seun, n.d: 60-76). "The combined primary and secondary enrolment for girls in developing countries grew from 38 % to 68% between the years 1970 and 1992-- with particularly high rates in East Asia (83%) and Latin America (87%). However, in the least developed countries enrolment rates are only 47% at the primary level' and 12% at the secondary level" (<https://www.unicef.org/sowc96/ngirls.htm>). The significance of education for the developing societies cannot be brushed aside because its role becomes a magic multiplier there.

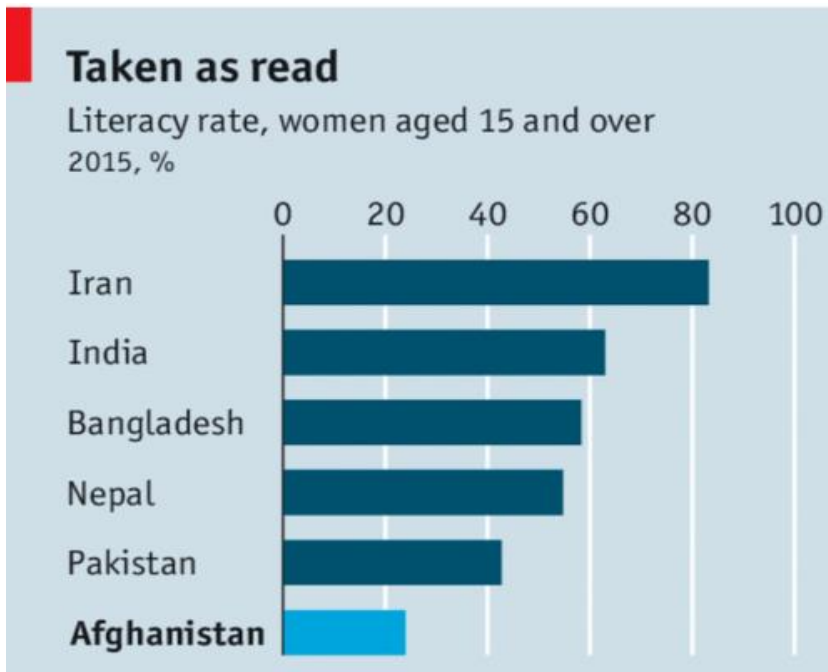
### **Conceptualizing Afghan Women Education**

Educating girls and women has long been touted within the "standard Liberal feminist discourse as the key to undoing systematic persecution of women built on gender, by providing them with tools that empower them to both flourish outside the native domain economically and also to challenge the rationalizations for women's subservience to men" (Kissane, 2012: 13). The continuous conflicts and wars bring an overall negative impact on the societies and nations in terms of education. As a result, the educational survival rate lessens owing to many factors, for example, displacement, financial adversities and military presence etc. The repercussions of conflicts epitomize major challenges for the national education systems (The Quantitative Impact...2010). The conflict zones never protect the children's right to education without education itself being protected. Education can be a protector because children can become an easy victim of child abuse and exploited by radical organizations to be misused against state and accomplishing their own objectives. The armed conflicts deteriorate the hopes, drives and motivations of entire young generations by transforming schools and children as war facilitators which has been a case itself in Afghanistan. Therefore schools can play a role of shield, rather to lessen the likelihood of future conflicts which may defend them from all social political abuses and crisis.

### *Afghan Women Education: Bottlenecks & Future*

In Afghanistan, generally, there are no legal bindings for women to get education. The article 21 of new Afghan Constitution describes that men and women should be treated equally and so is the case with the right to education for every citizen while Article 44 focuses on women education. Under Article 35, it is an offence to impede women right to education and is subject to six months imprisonment. Regrettably, there is a gap between “the *de jure* right to education and the *de facto* capacity to access” (Kissane, 2012: 14). In Afghanistan, women used to read in ancient times by educated persons, mostly from within families. But this education is not considered formal and it has no official standing.

Afghanistan is one of the world’s largest recipient in terms of donor funding whereas only between 2 to 6% of overseas development assistance is given to the educational sector (Barr, 2017: 5-20). An estimated 3.7 million children in Afghanistan do not attend school, out of which 60% are girls (<https://www.unicef.org/afghanistan/education>). The conflict-ridden society of Afghanistan has larger negative impact on female education in Afghanistan, together with socio-economic and cultural constraints. The schools have been used as tool by the insurgents and armed groups throughout the history. The ceaseless conflicts of four decades have not only ruined the educational sector but have given an impetus to a culture that hardly cares about this area of nation building (Hassan, 2019).



Source: Retrieved from <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2017/05/afghanistan-women-fighting-back/>

The Afghan women's right to education has been affected throughout the history due to many factors, for instance, "the lack of educational opportunities, isolation from family, forced marriages, domestic violence, and torment" (Pourzand, 1999). The years' long political instability, economic marginalization, wars, human rights' abuses and security threats have totally deteriorated the educational system especially for females in Afghanistan.

### **Brief Historical Background**

Afghan women were given the right to vote in 1919, and interestingly enough, the women in US got the right to vote a year later in 1920. But in second government of Emir Shir Ali Khan (1863-1866 & 1868-1879), among other reforms, education was also focused which led to the establishment of two military schools and a modern civilian school subsequently. During the reign of Amir Habibullah Khan (1901-1919), only one military school and the Habibia School were active, mainly boys were enrolled there (Haqmal, 2012). Whereas girls were taught at home and these women subsequently (during the reign of King Amanullah from 1919 onward), were employed as teachers. In Afghanistan, girls' school education started with the foundation of Afghan Modernization Programme which primarily changed the status of women under King Amanullah (1919-1929). His predecessor Habibullah Kalakani (January 1929-October 1929) almost completely overlooked the issue of girls' education; rather he had asked those girls to return home who have gone to Turkey for Education during those days. During 1923, reign of Amanullah, many reforms were introduced to improve women's lives. But there was a great protest against those reforms and Amanullah faced demise of government. When People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA) came to power, it had an agenda to empower women which led to 10 years war between Soviet Union and Afghanistan, declining women towards a different status. Though the reforms introduced during those periods were not successful yet the country witnessed a history of progressive efforts to offer women rights and develop the foundation for more egalitarian societies (Ahmad-Ghosh, 2003). After that Nadir Shah (1929-1933) followed King Amanullah's plan in a dormant mode. The only positive contribution was the establishment of Kabul University in 1933 (Bamik, 2018). His predecessor Zahir Shah (1933-1973) made a little contribution but without any remarkable achievement;

- a. The elementary school was made compulsory for 14 years
- b. The law of education was drafted

In 1960, a new constitution introduced equality of women in many areas including political participation. Gradually their rights were rolled back in 1980s and 1990s. Until 1970s, there was relatively progress in women rights in Afghanistan. In 1973, President Daud (1973-1978) introduced a five-year developmental plan including the educational sector but it also remained a paper work until he was ousted from power, following 1978s coup. The Communist government introduced Afghan Women Democratic Organization. This

organization faced the resistance from locals, ruled by tribal codes and henceforth the Communist Regimes though having strict approach towards female education remained unsuccessful to deal with the issue. In 1992, powers were transferred to Mujahideen. During Mujahideen era, the religious education was prioritized over the modern education. The educational institutions more often remained closed due to the internal conflicts and wars (Bamik, 2018). War and the suppressive educational policies of the Taliban regime (1996-2001) shattered the educational structure of the country. Women were proscribed from teaching and all girls' schools were steadily shut in 2000 (Marsden 1998, 89). It was considered the darkest era for female education (Baiza, 2013: 40-161). Taliban were ousted from power by the end of 2001. Though primary education was formally made compulsory and free in 1964 yet it was never implemented fully.

### **Post-Taliban/ Post-Intervention Area**

With the beginning of a new era in Post-Taliban scenario, the new government faced 2 big challenges;

- a) How to cope with high poverty rate and re-establish the system of education for “half of the school-age population”?
- b) How to support girls who Taliban barred?

However to meet the challenge, Afghan government with the help of international donors invested huge money for female education in the country (Barr, 2017: 5-20) and supported those girls who had earlier been barred to go to school.

In the following years in post intervention era, girls were able to go to school and work simultaneously. A new constitution in 2003 manifested women rights and in 2009, Afghanistan ratified the Elimination of Violence against Women (EVAW) Law<sup>2</sup> (<https://www.refworld.org/pdfid/5486d1a34.pdf>). Jones (2008: 278) states that “temporary tent-schools and back-to-school catch-up programmes appeared quickly in the reconstruction course as a retort to the massive gap between educated and non-educated children”. Educating Afghan women became the foremost agenda of international community, a vital indicator of the effectiveness of democratization efforts (Kissane, 2012: 12). Resultantly, the females' numbers in school enrolment increased from “naught to over 600, 000 in 2002” (Hedayat & Harpviken, 2014). While 4.3 million children were enrolled in primary and secondary levels, out of which 1/3<sup>rd</sup> were girls. However in Post-Taliban era, there has been a massive rise in enrolment for both boys and girls. Billions of dollars were given to the country for the developmental projects. Schools were built, teachers were recruited and there was a remarkable progress in sending children to schools. Nicolai (2008: 105) states that “As per the statistics of

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<sup>2</sup> This law has been enacted in accordance with the provisions set forth in Articles 24 and 54 of the Afghan Constitution. For details see <https://www.refworld.org/pdfid/5486d1a34.pdf>

Afghan Education Ministry, in 2002, only 50% of schools were functional while other 50% hardly had any buildings and only 50% of schools truly had a building". "Since 2001, the number of children enrolled in General Education (grades 1-12) has increased by almost 9 times, from 0.9 million (almost none of them girls) to 9.2 million with 39% girls. The number of schools has also improved from 3,400 to 16,400" (<https://www.globalpartnership.org/country/afghanistan>).

Whereas the proportion of boys and girls with the ages from 7-12 years were 67% and 40.5%. Subsequently likewise the number of schools has increased from 3, 800 in 2002 to 7, 1334 at present. Females' enrolment has increased since 2003, even in traditional Pashtun areas like Griskh in Helmand Province where 500 girls were showed upon the first day. There is diversity on the country as in few parts of the country; the ratio is on rise whereas at few other places, it is declining.

"In 2008, 6.3 million children were registered in' school, comprising 4.9 million at the primary level of education, signifying the largest school population in Afghanistan's history. This accomplishment is even more incredible when one contemplates that by the end of the Taliban regime in 2001, Afghanistan had only 774,000 students in primary school" (The Quantitative Impact...2010). Nonetheless this upturn in enrolment has placed a major pressure on Afghanistan's already feeble educational substructure.

Major safety questions do continue for students and teachers in Afghan schools even today. The Afghan women have remained excluded from formal education both in Pre- and Post-Conflict, but conversely in Post 2001, the ratio of both men and women increased vis-à-vis the formal education. Nonetheless the progress is not as good as was expected because challenging the rampant culture requires years to implement. Presumably these aids provided access to the Afghan females for educating themselves. Nevertheless unfortunately, the foremost barriers faced by Afghan women have been overlooked both by the Afghan governments and International Organizations (Bamik, 2018).

Though people are keen to get education yet there are grave obstacles and limitations. The flow in enrolment still signifies only a little more than half of school-age children and 40 % of the girls. "In addition these statistics do not divulge the actual dramatic regional and urban-rural gaps with girls' signifying less than 15% of overall enrolment in 9 provinces in the East and South. Girls' enrolment is determined by not only the obtainability of girls' schools, however also whether there are female teachers available or not (Barr, 2017: 5-20). There is a large imbalance when urban-rural distribution of teachers (at all levels of education) is studied, particularly in the capital and other cities in the North and West of the country. No concrete step has been taken by Afghan government in Post war period as no national legislation has been implemented for compulsory education; nonetheless children are required to complete education till class 9 as per law.

## **Management of Afghan Education System**

Afghan education system is managed by three distinct units;

- 1) The Ministry of Education (MoE)
- 2) The Ministry of Higher Education (MoEH)
- 3) The Religious Institutions (Global Initiative Out...2018)

## **Types of Afghan Schools**

Four major types of Afghan schools are;

1. **Government Schools-** Though there is no fee yet money is needed to buy things for class work etc. Apparently, it looks a trivial issue, however family needs money and thus they prefer boys over girls.
2. **Community-Based Education/ Schools (CBE)<sup>3</sup>** – They are becoming more effective and help in tackling the systematic barriers to girls’ education in Afghanistan. They are run by NGOs and funded by foreign donors. The CBE provides girls an easy access to get educated. It has so far increased the girls’ enrollment and test scores.
3. **Madrasahs-** Largely focusing on religious education, differing from government curriculum.
4. **Private Schools-** Very expensive, believing to offer high quality of education and are usually present at the places where there is no government school.

Apart from those, there is another 5<sup>th</sup> type of school which exist in the country ,i-e; Ghost Schools. According to an estimate, almost \$769 million American aid has been wasted on those schools which never existed (Iftikhar, 2015).

## **What are the Bottlenecks?**

All social challenges that impede female education are directly linked to the cultural norms in Afghanistan where boy’s education is still more important than girl’s. The strong cultural and gender norms in the country help supporting the prevailing inequalities vis-à-vis female access to education.

<b>Reasons for Not Attending Primary-Level School</b>	<b>Percentage %</b>
Geographical Reasons	29
Insecurity	5
Economic Scarcity	4

**Source: Hidayat, Lida Nadery & Harpviken, Kristian Berg. (2014, November 23). Where do Afghan Women Stand on Education and Economic Empowerment? PRIO Paper Oslo: Background Brief for the Symposium. Women’s Rights and Empowerment in Afghanistan.**

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<sup>3</sup> It is a model that has been used to successfully reach many Afghan girls who would otherwise be denied education. It remains entirely outside the government education system and is wholly dependent on donor funding.

As compared to primary, secondary and high school, the inequality in gender is greater in Afghan Higher education (Shayan, 2015: 277-284). Shayagan (2018) writes that “Based on official statistics of the Ministry of Education, there are more than 17800 schools in Afghanistan, out of which 2,700 are girls’ schools and more than 6,300 boy schools and more than 8,700 girl and boy schools (co-education). Badakhshan and Bamyán are the two provinces where the number of girl schools is more than boy schools. Helmand province has 8 girl schools, Kandahar has 11, and Zabul has 13 which are three provinces in Afghanistan that have the least girl schools in comparison to other provinces”. A survey conducted by the Central Statistics Organization explains that “84% of Afghan women are uneducated and only 2% of them have access to higher education” (Jahanmal, 2017).

<b>Education</b>	<b>Girls %</b>	<b>Boys %</b>
Adolescent	37	66
Adult	19	49

**Source: Barr, H. (2017). I won’t be a Doctor and One Day You’ll be Sick: Girls’ Access to Education in Afghanistan. New York, NY: Human Rights Watch. Pp. 5-20**

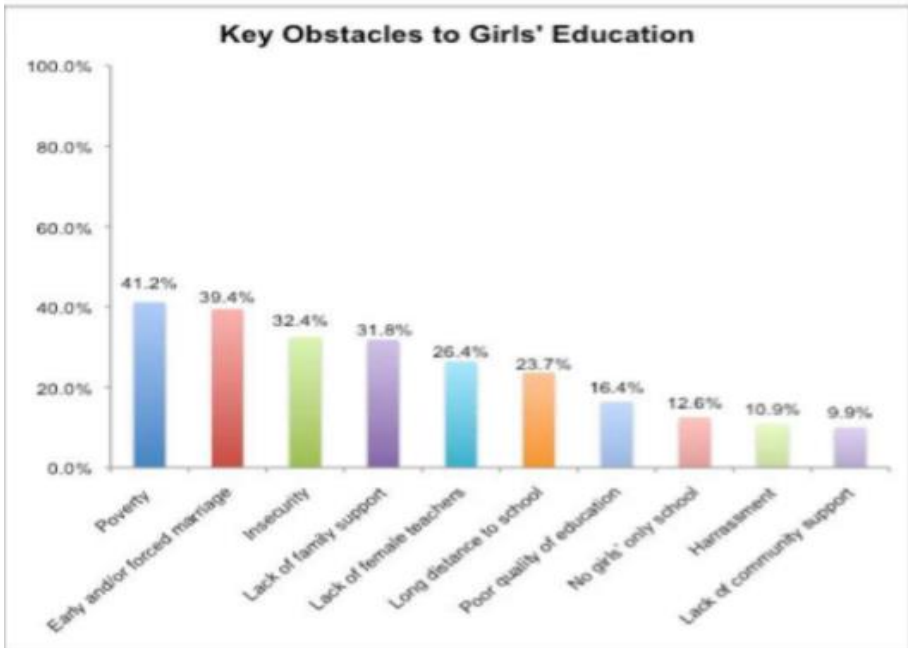
The ratio of Afghan girls going to school has never been above 50%. UNICEF have relied on Afghan data of 2010-11 states that 66% of Afghan girls (12-15 years of age) are out of school

<b>Year</b>	<b>Total Children Enrolled</b>	<b>Female %</b>
2015	8 Million	39
2016	6 Million	-
2017	9.3 Million	39

**Source: Barr, H. (2017). I won’t be a Doctor and One Day You’ll be Sick: Girls’ Access to Education in Afghanistan. New York, NY: Human Rights Watch. Pp. 5-20**

At governmental level, efforts like Education for all (EFA) and National Educational Strategic Plan (NESP) were introduced in the country but nothing much has been achieved, the deep-rooted rigid cultural norm has been a stumbling block though (Bamik, 2018).





Source: Joint NGO Briefing Paper. High Stakes: Girls' Education in Afghanistan. (2011, February 4). Retrieved from <https://oxfamilibrary.openrepository.com/bitstream/handle/10546/125287/bp-high-stakes-girls-education-afghanistan-240211-en.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>

## 1. Dominant Patriarchal Codes

As far as rural Afghanistan is concerned, it is the root of the tribal powers. It is the area where the gender roles are determined by patriarchal kinship arrangements (Ahmad-Ghosh, 2003). The country has strong patriarchal attitudes towards womanhood which regulates all relationships by means of education. This system leads Afghan women towards marginalization. The dominant patriarchal codes in the country inhibit girls to get education Afghanistan.

## 2. Discrimination against Women - Cultural Factor/ Gender Norms

Coomaraswamy (2002) writes that much of the literature validates that stereotyping more often lead to the violations of human rights and fundamental liberties of individuals. Women in Afghanistan are discriminated as a result of “prevailing dogmas of patriarchy since childhood, even before birth. And part of the reason that Afghan girls are facing severe gender discrimination pertaining to the dominant discriminatory cultural norms among the communities in Afghanistan” (Bamik, 2018).

Girls in Afghanistan do come across not only the regional inequalities but rural-urban disparities as well. Though the number of teachers and schools are the main

reasons yet insecurity factor cannot be ruled out. Apart from that, there are several socio-cultural and political factors which have an adverse impact on girl's enrolment and school retention, like poverty, pursuing of girls' schools by the opponents of the preset government and culturally dogged philosophies of education as superfluous or detrimental for girls. Substantial regional and ethnic heterogeneities occur within Afghanistan – not only in terms of limitations but opportunities as well (Reddy, 2016: 90-91).

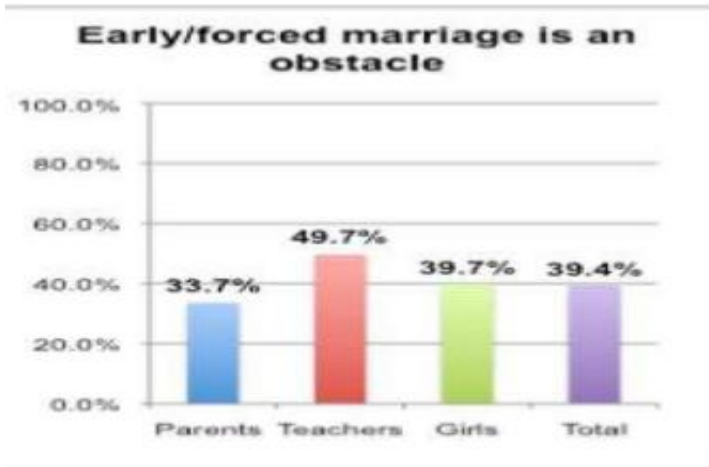
Owing to gender inequality, most of the families give preference to boys' education whereas in some cases the girls are allowed to go to school until they reach puberty.

Indicator	National	Male	Female	Rural	Urban
Gender Parity Index (GPI): Secondary	0.51			0.38	0.74
Gross Intake Primary Education (%)	48.5	53.6	42.9	41.1	77.4
Net Intake rate in Primary Education (%)	20.8	22.9	18.7	18.4	35.5
Net Attendance rate primary education (%)	56.1	65.5	45.5	54.0	74.3
Primary completion rate (%)	56.6	51.9	33.2	33.7	74.6
Youth literacy rate (%)	53.6	68.2	38.7	47.9	75.1

Source: Jantazi, et.al; (2019, May). *Mid-Term Evaluation of the Increasing Access to Basic Education and Gender Equality Programme (Afghanistan) (2015-2019)*. The Konterra Group

### **3. Early Marriages**

The early child marriage is another great obstacle. Many Afghan girls (about 2/3rd) get married before they reach to 18 years of age and this is a main reason why most of the girls remain out of school. As per Afghan law, girls can get married at the age of 15 or 16, but with the permission from girl's father or Judge. However it is rarely practiced under law. Serat (2016) states that "The United Nations holds that 7 million and 300,000 girls get married before reaching the legal age around the world every year, of which 12% are Afghan girls. The costs of child marriage are acutely injurious, which lead to the dropping out or being barred from education. Barr (2017) writes that, earlier a girl gets married, the more it becomes a victim of domestic vehemence.



Source: Joint NGO Briefing Paper. High Stakes: Girls' Education in Afghanistan. (2011, February 4). Retrieved from <https://oxfamlibrary.openrepository.com/bitstream/handle/10546/125287/bp-high-stakes-girls-education-afghanistan-240211-en.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>

#### **4. Geographical Barriers**

No doubt, there is a shortage of schools and sufficient teachers in the country yet the mountainous region makes the access harder. Vinson (2018) maintains that “the enrollment falls by 16 percentage points for every mile that children must travel to get to school and the test scores fall by 0.19 standard deviations”.

#### **5. Sexual Harassment**

The increased insecurity/ lawlessness/ unchecked crimes and abuses (Kidnapping and sexual harassment) have abandoned parents to send their children to school, and especially the girls. Sexual harassment is also a grim fence to school attendance. It has largely been unrestrained, hard to inhibit, and due to harsh gender norms can have destructive repercussions for a girl's reputation. In such cases, the distances from schools also become a cause for the both boys and girls to remain out of schools. Therefore, in most of the cases the families prefer their girls to stay at home. Henceforth, the location of the school plays an important role due to safety concerns and thus proximity plays a vital role to boost participation (Vinson, 2018).

The stigmatization and social taboos connected to rape restrict the families to send their girls to schools. The waning outcome of sexual violence among the communities and families unsurprisingly creep into education systems. The psychological effects, accompanied by depression, trauma, shame, and withdrawal, have shattering costs for girls' education. Fear of social stigmatization from sexual

abuses decides children future for education (Violence and sexual...2012). The Afghan families surrender to victimization they face, resulting in letting go of the school without realizing the fact that only education can better help the abused child to overcome the fatalities (Caring for child...2012).

## **6. Poverty**

Afghanistan is witnessing a rise in absolute poverty and the economic and security crisis have widened the gulf. Eventually, children get involved into paid or informal labor. “Only half of Afghanistan’s child laborers attend school. At least a quarter of Afghan children (between ages 5 and 14) work for a living or to help their families, including 27% of 5 to 11-year-olds” (Global Initiative Out...2018). Therefore, household, street begging, carpet weaving, tailoring or selling in the streets is very much common. Work forces children to conglomerate the afflictions of a job with education or compels them out of school completely.

## **7. Security Reasons**

The security situation is also gender-biased in Afghanistan as more of the girls and their schools are targeted by certain groups. These challenges have been multifaceted by a security situation that has developed gradually worse in contemporary history. Armed conflict has escalated, with the Taliban’s control over 70% of the country’s districts. 45 districts are under the control of non-state armed groups and 118 are contested – about 40% of the country’s districts (<https://www.sigar.mil/quarterlyreports/>). This confines the level of investment and access that government can offer for education, principally in the more secluded milieus of the country.

## **8. Scarcity of Schools & Teachers**

“Nationally around 31% of teachers are female, with the majority being in Kabul (74% of all teachers), Balkh (53%) and Herat (47%). Nevertheless, there are provinces where the number of female teachers is less than 2%. Paktika has the lowest number of teachers in the country where total teachers are 3656 and out of which only 60 are female” (Hedayat & Harpviken, 2014). The less number of female teachers affect the number of females enrolled in schools too. Less the female teachers, fewer the female students are. Owing to a stark dearth of schools and teachers, especially females, the girls cannot go to school. Though schools for boys are fewer at some places yet the girls suffer the most. However the Community-based education has allowed many girls to educate themselves, it needs government support as otherwise this system remains unreliable and insurmountable.

## **9. Expenditures of Government Schools**

Despite the exemption of tuition fee in government schools, sending a child to school is still costly. The government is liable for supplying textbooks, still many issues occur like shortage, theft and more often books do not arrive on time, and henceforth, students have to buy books themselves too more often. These indirect costs lead to fewer enrollments in schools.

## **10. Overloaded Schools without Facilities & Poor Quality of Teaching**

Overcapacity, lack of substructure and provisions, and fragile inaccuracy mean that children study only for few hours and that also without any text books. Owing to this overcrowded situation, many children still have to sit outside even if there are school buildings. The school buildings are damaged though and hardly the curriculum is covered. 30% of Afghan government schools are devoid of safe drinking water, and 60% do without toilets which cause other hygiene problems to the young girls. Oxfam (2008: 2-23) writes that “only 20% of Afghan teachers are considered qualified and less than a 3<sup>rd</sup> of them are females”. At least 25,000 more female teachers are required to meet the deficiency. 30% of the Afghan schools are devoid of safe drinking water while 60% of toilets. Teachers get very low pay about less than \$100 US per month. Teachers are not regular and there is no option for replacement. “7 out of 34 provinces have less than 34% female teachers and in 17 provinces, there are less than 20 % female teachers” (Barr, 2017: 5-20). So it reduces the numbers of female students because of the family bindings of not being taught by male teachers. The documentation is another issue because many families, who had been displaced because of war and moved to a new place, face the insurmountable hurdles in their new location for documentation.

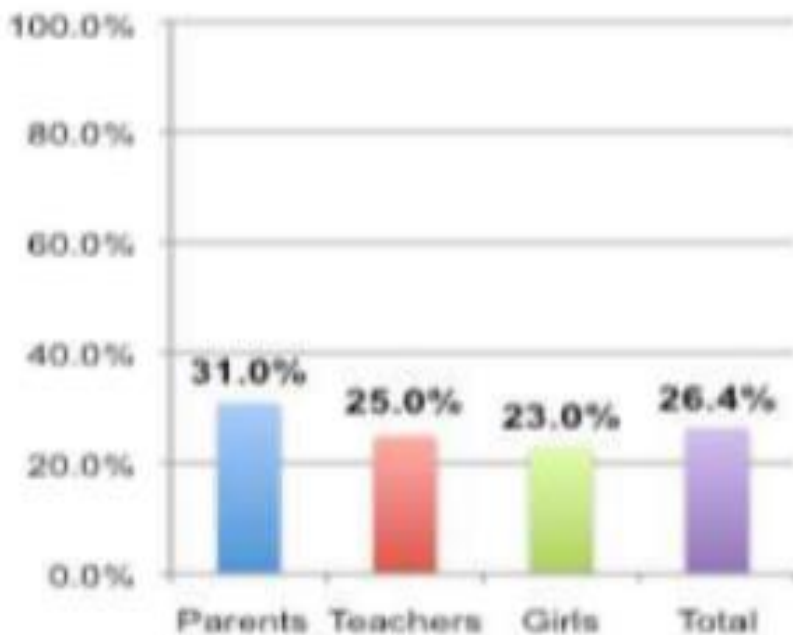
The quality of teaching is very low and this results in low literacy rate. The main reasons behind this challenge are small school shifts, gaps in staffing and low wages. The wages of a teacher normally are under US\$100 per month. The frequent absence is another big issue because there is no accountability, and hardly those absent teachers are changed. Though the female teachers have difficult access to schools yet the number of teaching positions has risen annually in the years preceding 2013, has stopped now. “7 out of 34 provinces have less than 10 % female teachers, and in 17 provinces, less than 20 % of the teachers are women” (<https://www.hrw.org/report/2018/11/12/shall-i-feed-my-daughter-or-educate-her/barriers-girls-education-pakistan>). The quality of education is very poor as only 48% of Afghan teachers have the minimum academic qualifications (equivalent to an Associate Degree) (<https://www.unicef.org/sowc96/ngirls.htm>).

## **11. Resistance to Male Teachers**

Resistance to male teachers varies from province to province in Afghanistan. Those areas which have shunned this discrimination have full support of their

families and in this regard the role of school administrators and community elders has remained remarkable. With the passage of time, this is leading towards an increase number of female teachers in schools as well, particularly in the Central Afghanistan (such Ghazni, Bamiyan, Daykundi provinces and in some ways in Badakhshan Province and some Northern provinces of the country). Barr, (2017) and Samady, (2013: 588-602) write that “this cultural and public responsiveness offer the ground for a new tradition in which families try to reassure their daughters to complete their education so that they may adopt teaching as profession and support other girls in their communities”. This transformation in approaches towards the girls’ education is more widespread. However girls (with the exception of cities) attend school, confronting with grave cultural constraints. Nevertheless most of the families do not allow their girls to go to school and in case if the families permit, the girls do not get into the secondary levels (Shayagan, 2018).

### **Lack of female teachers is an obstacle**



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**Percentage of Female Teachers by Province**

A few male teachers in the database did not have an Educational Level Associated – hence the male percentages only add to 99.2% with 0.8% unrecorded education level.

<b>Region</b>	<b>No. of Female Teachers</b>	<b>No. of Male Teachers</b>	<b>Percentage Female %</b>
<b>CENTRAL</b>			
Bamyan	154	271	56.8
Daikundi	238	374	63.6
Pakktika	5	345	1.4
Paktya	44	257	17.1
<b>EAST</b>			
Laghman	12	68	17.6
Nangarhar	27	148	18.2
<b>NORTH</b>			
Badakhshan	43	593	7.3
Balkh	164	814	20.1
Faryab	86	466	18.5
Jawzjan	34	98	34.7
Samangan	258	486	53.1
Sar-e-Pul	53	154	34.4
<b>SOUTH</b>			
Helmand	38	622	6.1
Kandhar	60	532	11.3
Urozgan	18	723	2.5
Zabul	69	639	10.8
<b>WEST</b>			
Badghis	105	328	32.0
Farah	664	1159	57.3
Ghor	72	375	19.2
Herat	211	314	67.2
<b>Total</b>	<b>2355</b>	<b>8766</b>	<b>26.9</b>

Source: UNICEF CBE Database as of April 2019.

## **12. Government Policies**

Some government policies weaken the determination to get girls in school. Government schools characteristically have a number of documentation requirements, comprising government-issued credentials, and official transfer letters for children shifting their schools. Whereas these requirements might seem routine, for families fleeing war, or surviving from one meal to the next, they can present an insuperable hitch that retains children out of school. This becomes a reason that many children remain out of school. These obstructions can be predominantly detrimental for girls, as bigoted gender roles may signify that girls are more likely to lack identification, and to seek out to register late and consequently be affected by age restrictions and restrictions on enrolling mid-year. When families come across troubles attaining the documentation, they may be less likely to go to great efforts to secure these documents for girls. This hurdle is more serious for the internally displaced families.

## **13. Little Support for Disables**

In Afghan education system, very little support is given to those who are disabled. There is no facility for disabled students in the country. They are unlikely to receive any special assistance. Regular government schools normally have no institutionalized aptitude to deliver wide-ranging education or help children with infirmities. However there are few schools but with restricted space.

## **14. Socio-Political & Humanitarian Crises**

The socio-political and humanitarian crises that Afghanistan has long been facing mark a flimsy education system. Natural calamities for instance floods, earthquakes, and landslides worsen the conditions for all children. These dynamics rear parental apprehensions about safety and can inhibit them from sending their children to school. However, an organizational problem in the system and bungling resource management shows that it is not stress-free to make improvements (<https://www.unicef.org/sowc96/ngirls.htm>).

## **15. Donor Backing to Education**

In the contemporary times, Afghanistan has been one of the largest recipients in the world vis-à-vis the donor backing. Among its shares, the education sector receives, only between 2 and 6 % bureaucratic sprints, stumpy aptitude, corruption, and self-doubts have donated to even “these funds often going unspent by the Afghan government. The government expends less on education than certain international standards endorse, as measured against Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and the total national budget, replicating in part how donors have allocated their funding” (Strand, 2015). So far America is the largest donor to



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Afghanistan. UNICEF, UNESCO, USAID and the UN are making great contribution to the educational sector.

Notwithstanding the big promises made by International community at different forums, the inclusive outlook for aid in Afghanistan is descending. This situation, however, already has an impact on the many girls, studying outside the government's education system. The impact on girls' education could be even bigger in the future, as government fixed costs—particularly for security forces—take up an increasing share of a deteriorating aid budget. According to BBC, “In the post-2014, the aid funding has dropped largely since earlier under the system previously in place through the NATO military command, specific troop-contributing countries had security responsibility for each province, through a system of Provincial Reconstruction Teams. These countries normally invested in development aid, together with education, in the same province” (<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-37560704>).

## **16. Role of International Community**

The International community has played a greater role in Afghan women's involvement/ emancipation in all spheres of life. Today 27% of civil service is female and women are serving as mayors and provincial governors (Voices of Afghan...2019). The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development holds great promise for the lives of Afghan across the country. (<https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/memberstates/afghanistan>).

Traditionally, there has never been a systematized bottom-up women's movement. They had been under restrictions under Mujahedeen and Taliban rule (Friederike, 2004). Regrettably, the position and suffering of women in Afghanistan, even after the fall of Taliban and long years of global assistance, does not seem to change much (Reddy, 2016: 90-91). Since last 18 years, there has been a stark rise in the numbers of school going girls however still it carries complications and threats hovering around. It is not only the aid Afghanistan needs for female education, the country also needs efforts to rule out the obstructions in its access.

## **Barriers to Higher Education**

At the Higher Education Level, “men outnumber the female faculty with the ratio of 8: 1” (MoHe, 2005). Most of the female students when reach to the higher level of studies, they fail the University entrance exams. One major reason through different research studies revealed that they are not prepared for the exams as compared to their male counterparts. Also there is a limited capacity in the universities and thus many remain out of the higher institutions. Sometimes this situation has psychological repercussions and the females commit suicide due to repression (Winthrop, 2003: 247-252).

<b>Percentage (%) of Girls in Private Institutions</b>	<b>Percentage (%) of Girls in Public Universities</b>	<b>Faculties in Private Universities</b>	<b>Faculties in Public Universities</b>
18	19.2	244	187

Source: Hidayat, Lida Nadery & Harpviken, Kristian Berg. (2014, November 23). Where do Afghan Women Stand on Education and Economic Empowerment? PRIO Paper Oslo: Background Brief for the Symposium. Women's Rights and Empowerment in Afghanistan

### **A. Financial Limitations**

Kabul University is the only public university in Kabul while there are many others private but very expensive. This situation brings financial constraints on the females belonging to especially the middle class. The financial obstacle to higher education for Afghan women has not been tackled as it was supposed to be which in most cases is the imperative reason for not having access to the higher education.

### **B. Higher Education Leaders and Professors**

The higher education leaders and professors in Afghanistan are also a stumbling block to higher education for Afghan women. Certain higher education leaders take bribes from students to get college admission, favor individuals from specific tribes, and are biased against females (Mashriqi, 2016). In 2003, around 12 % of professors were female, 1/6th of them with a Bachelor's degree and only one out of 13 professors with a Master's degree. "Only 2 female professors had a PhD as compared to 130 male professors" (The role of...2005).

Azizi (2008) in one of his research report writes that higher education leaders have ethnic biases. Their behavior and lack of knowledge add fuel to fire. Most of the professors are men, and several among them do not believe that females should acquire higher education. They consequently give female students lower grades or are reproachful to the female students. Likewise, the higher education institutions in Afghanistan are devoid of resources, for example trained, competent and a sufficient number of faculty, comprising female instructors (Moreno, 2005; Sawahel, 2009). Zoepf (2006a) affirms that the nonexistence of plentiful and conversant professors is the outcome of the dearth of education over the years.

### **Analysis**

Female education in a country like Afghanistan is of much importance owing to concrete and emblematic motives. If the females attain universal and equality-based access to education, it will denote the disbanding of much pervasive hurdles. Sen (199a: 128-129) writes that the economic growth, political strength and eventually peace can be attained only through education and there is no substitute

for that. Female education in Afghanistan has seen many ups and downs throughout the history of Afghanistan. The people who suffered the most in the part of education were female. "From the very beginning, female education was not that much gratified prior to the civil war in Afghanistan. Nonetheless the three-decade civil war and conflicts made the circumstances shoddier for female students. It was the government of Taliban (1996-2001) when the female education fell to 0%. Anticipations emanated to lives with the establishing of the new government and backing of the international community in 2001. However, even after years, the female education is still deficient" (Mashwani, 2017). After the libratory prerogatives by the Western forces, the subject of educating women has been more rhetorical than actionable (Kissane, 2012: 11).

Only the education can help women in Afghanistan to fight discrimination, poverty and rigid cultural norms. The government and Afghan Ministry of Education needs to develop a mechanism for girls' access to the education. The women education to the higher levels could redefine their roles in the society, peace building and conflict resolutions. Their role in social change can help building political democracy. Afghanistan can develop when an educated women has its full contribution for ensuring democracy and poverty reduction (Ahmad-Ghosh, 2003). The education of Afghan women, at the end of the day will challenge the patriarchal authority of tribal leaders because to empower women is to create a sense of nationhood.

The Afghan women education is entrenched with frequent logistical and ideological obstructions, though the educational transformation is critical (Kissane, 2012: 11). It is the responsibility of the government to provide unbiased access to education. The obstacles regarding social and cultural practice should be shunned off with the emphasis that women should not be discriminated in society. The International law should be observed in its true letter and spirit. Governments need to safeguard functioning educational institutions and it should embrace buildings, sanitation facilities, safe drinking water, trained teachers getting domestically competitive salaries, teaching materials, and, where conceivable, facilities such as a library, computer facilities and information technology.

Though women education ratio is on increase after the fall of Taliban, yet in some areas their number is declining. According to Afghan government statistics, about 3.5 million children are out of school, 85% of whom are females. "The armed conflicts push the civilians at the center of conflicts, for example, Afghanistan, Bosnia-Herzegovina or Colombia, a culture of war has developed" (The People on...1999). The young girls and women have more often been victimized and destitute more in the times of conflicts and wars as compared to men and boys. Komitho, (2017) writes that "according to UNHCR, women include 49% of refugees worldwide, mostly as a result of wars. Besides experiencing psychological agony, they not only have to take care of their dependents but also of the children whom they give birth as a result of sexual violence. This situation is the greatest hurdle vis-à-vis the women access to the primary needs. It leads to the increased illiteracy rate. Gender gap must be closed and abridged..

## **Criteria to Implement Education & Solutions**

The democratization of education necessitates a pluralistic education and model that implicates both state and non-governmental segments, making it handy and suitable to the maximum Afghan women population. The role of education for Afghan women cannot be overstated since they are definitely the agents who drive social transformation. The educated women can help introduce a pluralistic system of education which can be best suitable for the female generations to come, together with the democratic projects in the country (Kissane, 2012: 10-14). Afghanistan is the country that has the lowest human development in the world and henceforth, the investment in education, particularly for women, is imperative to human growth.

1. Availability- (of schools) Throughout the country
2. Accessibility- To all on equal basis
3. Acceptability- The quality of education should be of at least minimum standards
4. Adaptability- It should meet the needs of students, keeping in view the varied social and cultural situations (Tomaševski, 2001).

The insurance of Functioning Educational Institutions is the need of the hour. Including “buildings, sanitation facilities for both sexes, safe drinking water, trained teachers receiving domestically competitive salaries, teaching materials and where possible facilities such as library, computer facilities and information technology” (Barr, 2017: 5-20).

Afghan government and International donors must take the tangible steps for pursuing primary and secondary education of girls by;

- a. Implementing compulsory education across the country
- b. Training teachers for the delivery of quality education
- c. Introducing gender-equitable curriculum (Vinson, 2018)
- d. Devising a proper system to check the data about those females who do not go to school and then engaging their families and convincing them for girls’ education
- e. Offering handsome salaries with special incentives to work in the remote areas, ensuring their security
- f. Focusing on Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET)
- g. Engaging Afghan women in non-formal training and skills, eventually leading to the indispensable education for girls

Other what can be done at the national level is;

1. The religious leaders should play a positive role to encourage families for girls’ education since the religion can be used as a catalyst in promoting women’s right to education. This is the bottom-up attitude to education which consolidates the essentials and interests of Afghan girls and women (Kissane, 2012: 10).

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2. Female friendly well equipped schools should be built/ opened especially in remote areas.
3. Community-based schools at the secondary level must be standardized which may ultimately support in increasing access to post-primary education
4. The checking system of schools and accountability at both the local and central level needs to be improved.
5. The safety and security of schools, predominantly in conflict areas must be prioritized.
6. The solid contacts between schools and parents ought to be started and retained.
7. The emphasis on learning outcomes should be steadily increased
8. The adult literacy and learning requirements must be taken as a fundamental part of poverty reduction.
9. The political settlement(s) with Armed Opposition Groups should not become a hurdle in girls' education in any case.
10. Hunt local solutions and encompass communities in decision making and execution wherever possible.
11. Create an effective political society based on gender-equality and civil liberties while introducing the laws of gender equality

### **Future**

Though women education has a lot many hurdles in a war-torn country like Afghanistan yet there is a hope. Things are changing rapidly and pretty different than what were prior to 2001. It signifies the worth of cooperation and malleable models for offering education. Gradually, the idea of impartial educational prospects is getting momentum. However, the fruits of education are not devoid of impediments. It may be anticipated that one day the education itself will break the barriers and the empowered educated Afghan women have undoubtedly the potentials to rule out the centuries' old and rigid cultural norms and change the course of history (Kissane, 2012: 23).

The Post conflict situations always necessitate the reconstruction of educational systems. Most of the past policies have remained unsuccessful because they focused on mere educating and empowering women while overlooking the social and economic realities of many Afghan women. The division between social realities and the centralized political decisions has led to the failures of implementation and execution of the policies in its true form. Afghanistan has the lowest literacy rate among the world countries. According to the Afghan Minister of Education (AME), "the population aged 15 scores 26%, and females score lower than 12%. This percentage is even lower in rural than urban areas where female's participation is increasing. Hence, within the country the literacy programs have been developed based on state and international civil society's efforts"(Mohammad, 2018).

It is important to abate the “direct and indirect costs of schooling as poverty has been signified as a major stumbling block when it comes to a daughter’s education” (Guimbert, Mitwa & Nguyen, 2008). The history about the education of Afghan women is not satisfactory. Even by the end of 20<sup>th</sup> and beginning of 21<sup>st</sup> century when most of the world nations were practicing modern education, it was the worst ever. Though in the recent times, the women education has improved yet it faces a lot many challenges and the problem still continues. The higher the level of education in Afghanistan, the more the problem increases. Having enormous challenges, the foremost challenge is the traditional one, the society and culture. This problem will resolve with complete transformation of traditional mindset. The barriers can be removed once Afghan women are financially stable and their strong belief of obtaining higher education, both internal (self-motivation and belief to get higher education) and external barriers (cultural limitations). As more women acquire higher education, they may be capable to upturn their effect on the dynamics that are not internal. Along with other problems, the cultural and normative traits remain the core challenges for Afghan women education which require self-determination by Afghan women itself too. It is unquestionably true that more the number of educated girls in a society, more a society becomes democratic, transforming itself from authoritarianism. Education is the only fundamental tool inter-connected with power that can close the gender gap. It is only through the mode of education that the values and norms of this society are questioned (Mosawi, 2015) and rampant patriarchy of the country is undone (Kissane, 2012: 13).

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