

Afghanistan

National Reconstruction and
Poverty Reduction - the Role of
Women in Afghanistan's Future

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Acronyms and Abbreviations

ACBAR	Agency Coordinating Body for Afghan Relief
ACF	Action Contre la Faim
ADB	Asian Development Bank
AGG	Advisory Group on Gender
AIHRC	Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission
AREU	Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit
ARTF	Afghan Reconstruction Trust Fund
CG	Consultative Group
CDC	Community Development Council
CDC	U.S. Center for Disease Control and Prevention
CHA	Country Gender Assessment
DACAAR	Danish Committee for Aid to Afghan Refugees
EC	European Commission
EFA	Education For All
EU	European Union
FAO	Food and Agricultural Organization
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GER	Gross Enrolment Ratio
IDA	International Development Assistance
IDP	Internally Displaced Person
IMF	International Monetary Fund
IRA	Islamic Republic of Afghanistan
ISAF	International Security Assistance Force
MDG	Millennium Development Goals

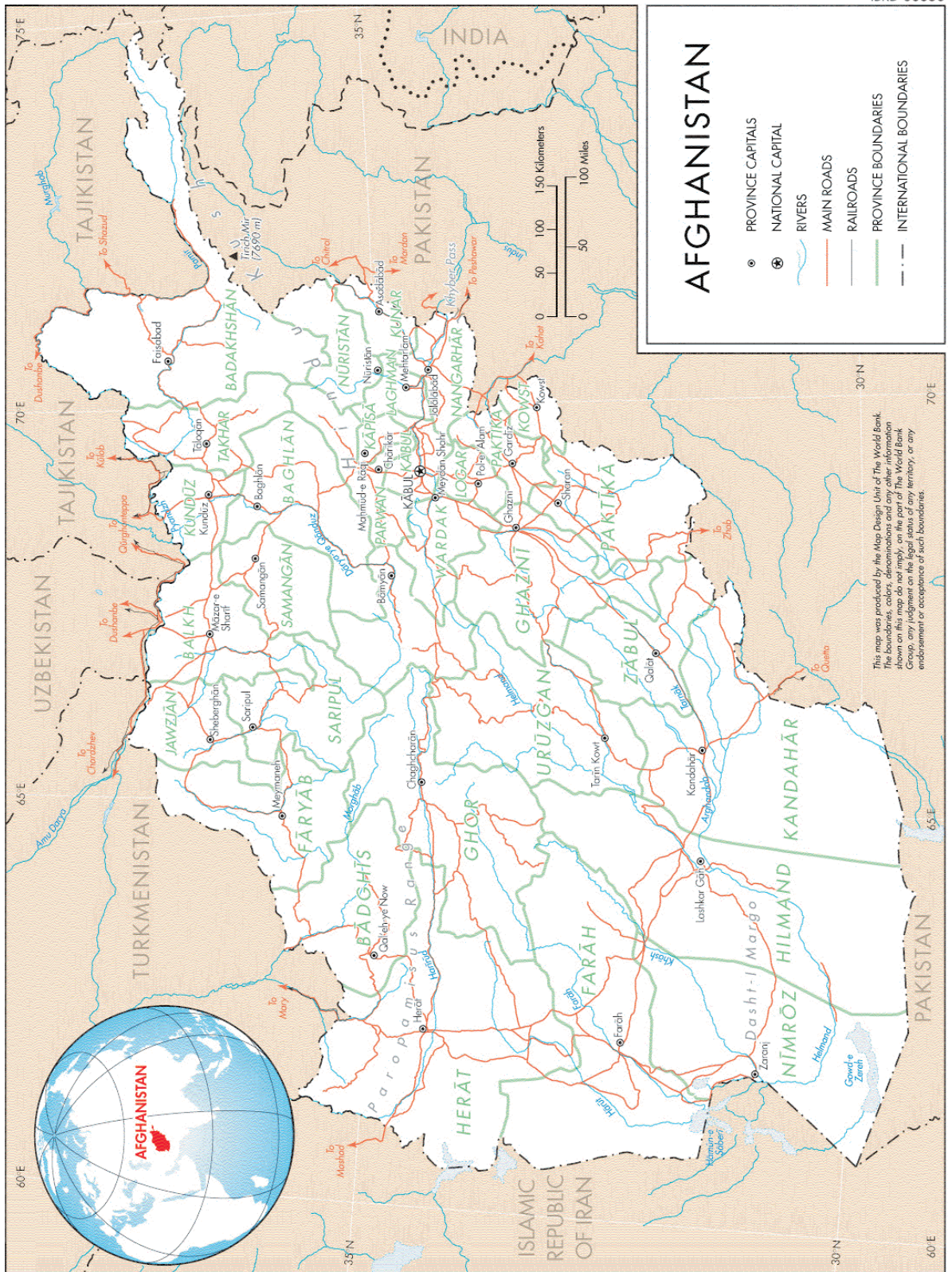
MICS	Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey
MMR	Maternal Mortality Rate
MOE	Ministry of Education
MOWA	Ministry of Women's Affairs
MRRD	Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development
MSF	Médecins Sans Frontières
NDF	National Development Framework
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organisation
NDB	National Development Budget
NEEP	National Emergency Employment Programme
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
NRVA	Nationwide Risk and Vulnerability Assessment
NSP	National Solidarity Programme
PDPA	Peoples' Democratic Party of Afghanistan
PIHAM (AHPIM)	Animal Health and Livestock Production Improvement Module
TDF	Terre des hommes
UN	United Nations
UNAMA	United Nations Assistance Mission to Afghanistan
UNDCP	United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNFPA	United Nations Fund for Population Activities
UNHCR	United Nations High Commission for Refugees
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNIFEM	United Nations Development Fund for Women
UNODC	United Nations Office of Drug Control
WHO	World Health Organization



Glossary

<i>agir</i>	Government staff hired on fixed-term contract
<i>arbab</i>	Village headman
<i>ashar</i>	Communal, unpaid labor, based on reciprocity
<i>bad</i>	Crimes ranging from saying an improper word to murder or violating someone's namus. Fines are determined according to severity of bad
<i>burqa</i>	All-enveloping veil, which covers a woman from head to foot with only a small lace to look through
<i>hadd</i>	Punishment laid down for acts forbidden in the Qur'an. The hadd is a right or claim of Allah and no pardon or amicable settlement is possible once the case has been brought before the judge.
<i>hamsaya</i>	Neighbour - also refers to tenants who are provided free lodging in return for various domestic services
<i>hijab</i>	Refers to modest dress concealing a woman's body and hair. The exact 'hijab dress code' varies historically, country-wise and also among communities.
<i>jihad</i>	Etymological meaning is 'an effort directed towards a determined objective'. The struggle against the PDPA and the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan was termed a Jihad, popularly translated as 'holy war'.
<i>jirga</i>	Traditional informal, ad hoc local/tribal council consisting of male elders of all lineages/and or extended families of a village or tribal group.
<i>karmand</i>	Permanent, tenured government staff
<i>Loya Jirga</i>	"Grand Council". Consultative assembly based on the tribal institution of jirga.
<i>madrasa</i>	Institution where Islamic sciences are taught, i.e. religious school
<i>mahram</i>	'Permitted' category of relatives of opposite sex, i.e. either one's spouse or close relatives with whom sexual relations are forbidden.

<i>mujahedin</i>	One who partakes in jihad. The Afghan resistance fighters to the PDPA government and the Soviet occupation were called and called themselves 'mujahedin'.
<i>nang</i>	Honor, Disgrace
<i>namus</i>	Reputation, chastity.
<i>qaum</i>	Relative and situational concept referring to a person's 'in-group' such as ethnic group, lineage, sub-lineage, local community or even sect
<i>shura</i>	Traditional council, mainly in non-tribal areas, consisting of male elders of community
<i>tarbia</i>	Manners and moral quality
<i>talaq</i>	Divorce according to Shari'a
<i>zina</i>	Adultery, fornication, i.e. sexual intercourse between persons who are not in a state of legal matrimony.





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The report has also benefited greatly from very useful dialogue at a workshop in Kabul in September with national and international agencies active in the various sectors covered by this report. More generally, the report takes as a foundation the vision for Afghanistan set forth in the Government's *National Development Framework* (April 2002), further detailed in the more recent Government document: *Securing Afghanistan's Future: Accomplishments and the Strategic Path Forward* (March 2004).

This report constitutes a synthesis of the information which presently is available on the situation of women in Afghanistan, collating information from a wide variety of sources

and comparing with international experiences. The effort that has gone into preparing this study reaffirms the World Bank's shared commitment with the government of Afghanistan to address the dramatic gender disparities in the country. The report is not a policy document, but constitutes input for the Government in the ongoing debate on women's role in Afghanistan's future. The challenge now is to formulate policies, develop and implement reforms, in partnership between the Government of Afghanistan and donors to provide practical and effective programs that will enable women to participate fully in the rebuilding of Afghanistan.



Executive Summary



Executive Summary

Background. Throughout the 20th century, the debate on women's rights and their role in Afghan society has been closely interlinked with the national destiny. Women not only carry the burden of symbolizing the honor of the family, but often are seen as embodying the national honor as well. Gender has thus been one of the most politicized issues in Afghanistan over the past 100 years, and attempts at reform have been denounced by opponents as un-Islamic and a challenge to the sanctity of the faith and family. During the years of turmoil, concerns about women's security led to the imposition of ever-stricter interpretations of socially acceptable female behavior, supported by the most conservative reading of the holy scriptures. Despite the rhetoric, women suffered from very serious human rights violations throughout the conflict. While it justified itself on the basis of protecting women, the Taliban regime's retrogressive views on gender resulted in the opposite, as women were not allowed to work or receive even basic education, and restrictions on their mobility obstructed their access to medical care.

With the overthrow of the Taliban regime in 2001, Afghanistan embarked upon a new beginning, recognizing anew the contribution of the female half of its society. The Bonn Agreement called for specific attention to the role of women and established a dedicated government structure for this purpose, the Ministry of Women's Affairs. The core strategy for women's advancement is defined as 'gender mainstreaming' in the National Development Framework.

This report is intended to serve as an input for the government's efforts to address gender disparities. *The Role of Women in Afghanistan's Future* synthesizes existing information and

identifies critical areas in which gender-responsive actions are likely to enhance growth, poverty reduction and human well-being. The extent of gender discrimination in Afghanistan is pervasive, and the present report focuses on a few key sectors deemed particularly important for both short- and long-term interventions. Gender gaps are widespread in health, education, access to and control over resources, economic opportunities and power and political voice, and while women and girls bear the direct cost of these inequalities, the negative effects are felt throughout society.

Health. Afghanistan's health indicators are among the worst in the world, particularly in the areas of child health and women's reproductive health. When reconstruction started in 2002, the following indicators were reported: an under-five mortality rate of 257, infant mortality rate of 165, and estimated maternal mortality rate of 16 (per 1,000 live births); rate of chronic malnutrition (moderate or severe stunting) around 50%; and very high rates of disability due to polio, cerebral palsy, and conflict (including landmines). Among children, diarrhea, acute respiratory infections, and vaccine preventable illnesses account for 60% of deaths. Among adults tuberculosis results in an estimated 15,000 deaths per year with 70% of detected cases being among women. Recent surveys have revealed that almost half of all deaths among women of reproductive age are a result of pregnancy and childbirth - and that more than $\frac{3}{4}$ of these deaths are preventable. Life expectancy is estimated at 44.5 years.

A range of factors contributed to this situation, such as the lack of access to basic health facilities - only 40% of the population is in the coverage areas of basic health facilities, and only 9% of rural households surveyed in 2003 reported a health facility in their village;¹ lack of female staff at the existing facilities particularly in rural areas; marked rural-urban disparities in availability of health facilities; and lack of infrastructure (roads and transport) and security that reduce mobility and access. Furthermore, the overall lack of clean drinking water and sanitation facilities contributes to a very high level of water-borne diseases.

The alarming health conditions of Afghan women do not reflect deliberate gender discrimination in households, but rather the result of poverty and the general lack of health facilities, which together with a number of social factors affect women particularly hard.

¹ World Bank, 2004, p. 105

These factors also include low marriage age and very high fertility among Afghan women - in other words, too many and too frequent child-births, without access to proper health care. To this should be added the widespread reluctance to let women seek medical assistance from male health workers, lack of awareness of maternal health care among men and women, and insufficient awareness of health, hygiene and nutrition.

Education. The adult literacy rate in Afghanistan is estimated to be 36%, while for adult women it is estimated at 21%² (2001). A significant leap in school enrollment has taken place during the last couple of years, and more than four million children are now in school, one-third of them girls, but this still represents only a little more than half of school-age children and 40% of girls. These figures hide dramatic regional disparities, with girls representing less than 15% of the total enrollment in nine provinces in the east and south. Besides gender disparity, such figures also reflect the persistent enormous urban-rural gaps. Furthermore, the schools are also struggling with high drop-out rates, which in 1999 were reported as 74% for girls of grades 1-5 as compared to 56% for boys.

The government aims for 100% enrollment as part of the MDG targets for 2015, with girls' enrollment share being 50%. Various obstacles to achieving this goal exist, such as lack of school facilities, in particular girls' schools in rural areas. The problem is even greater for girls' secondary schools, which are very few and scattered. Insecurity, combined with distance and lack of transport, prevents especially girls from accessing school facilities. Lack of female teachers particularly in rural areas; outdated curricula including the portrayal of gender roles; and schools lacking water supply and toilet facilities - all work as obstacles to girls accessing educational facilities. The custom of marrying girls off at a very young age also causes parents to consider school education for girls as unnecessary or even wasteful, and married girls in most cases do not continue their education.

A number of social factors have a negative impact on school enrollment for girls and on their retention rate: The major issue here is security, as political opponents to the present government are targeting girls' schools and carrying out terrorist attacks such as bombing or burning down schools, and campaigning against female education. Poverty is another major

² World Bank, 2004, p. 13. Adult literacy rate relates to the age group 15 and above

factor; although education is free, the cost of school uniform and stationery along with loss of girls' domestic labor/income earning activities are disincentives to enrollment for poor families. Low marriage age in particular leads to low retention rates for girls. Finally, a key issue is parents' negative attitude toward girls' education, particularly that of illiterate fathers'.

Work and Employment. Women play an extremely important role in all dimensions of agricultural production. In certain regions, women's time input equals men's, but in other regions traditions restrict their work to the household where they are involved in crop processing (threshing, cleaning, drying, preserving) and also are in charge of most of the household-based activities (water and fuel collection, cooking, cleaning, sewing, tailoring, weaving, and child rearing). Women play an increasingly important role in opium production, livestock production and processing of dairy products. Most of women's labor is non-monetized, but they make major labor contributions to a number of marketed products, such as dried fruits, poppy, fuel wood, dairy products and handicrafts. Women's contribution to pastoral livestock production both for domestic consumption and for the national and international market is high, which is reflected in a range of key export products, such as carpets, hides, karakul skins and wool. Even when women's domestic production such as carpet weaving forms the main income of the household, they rarely control the marketing of these products, which is most often managed by male relatives or middlemen.

Women's involvement in the formal sector has mainly been urban-based, as civil servants in the health and education sectors, where they had a sizeable presence before the conflict. This was severely disrupted by the strong restrictions on female employment during the Taliban period. Currently, close to one-third of all teachers are female, while an estimated 40% of all basic health facilities lack female staff, a clear constraint to delivering basic services (health, in particular) to women.

The traditional role of women in Afghanistan is a constraint to their more equitable participation in economic activities. In particular, female wage labor is still viewed as a solution of last resort for households in desperate straits, and their wage rates are normally only half the level of men's or less. Women have few marketable skills and generally poor education, with an estimated female literacy rate of 21%. With a fertility rate of 6.3 and a maternal mortality rate of 1,600 per 100,000, live births, reproduction and related health issues occupy much of women's time. The absence of many services and the need to produce

agricultural products for subsistence also imposes an opportunity cost for women who want to join the labor market. Women often lack ownership, control, and access to productive assets such as land, equipment and materials, and their legal right to inheritance is usually bypassed. The lack of working capital (until recently an absence of credit as well) reduces opportunities to start activities that require an initial investment.

Legal Rights and Voice. In Afghanistan, the patrilineal family with its notions of honor and shame defines gender relations in terms of complementarities rather than equality. Since women are the prime bearers of the family honor, their seclusion and chastity reflect the honor of the extended family, which controls (and limits) their relations with the outside world. The purdah norms to which all women must subscribe in varying degrees, on the other hand also require the man to protect and provide for the women of the family - they are his *nang* and *namus* (honor and reputation) and he is responsible for their well-being and for providing for them, if he wants to be counted as a man of honor.

As citizens, Afghan women face constitutional equality but legal inequality. Furthermore, there are great discrepancies between customary law, civil law and Islamic Law - as well as the informal justice system, which tends to grant women even less rights. Years of conflict and violence have further eroded the protection of women's (limited) rights, and a culture of impunity reigns as far as violence is concerned, including violence against women inside and outside the household. The present deteriorating security situation in many parts of the country constitutes the most serious obstacle to promoting rule of law, respect for human rights and introduction of legal reform, which would benefit women more than any other group in society.

The Cost and Consequences of Continued Gender Exclusion. Afghanistan is one of the poorest countries in the world with a GDP of US \$ 4.7 billion and GDP per capita of \$212³ excluding illicit opiate receipts. The overthrow of the Taliban regime and the establishment of relative peace and security in the country give the government in Afghanistan (as well as international agencies working in Afghanistan), a rare opportunity to work towards sustained economic development.

The structure of the economy in 2003 was heavily skewed in favor of agriculture (52% of GDP) with smaller contributions from industry and services at 24% each. *Securing Afghanistan's Future*

³ World Bank, 2004, p. 2

(2004) asserts that an annual economic growth rate of 9% over a 12-year period is needed to achieve adequate progress toward the MDGs while phasing out the drug economy. It is highly unlikely that such a growth rate could be tenable in the long run without making special efforts to involve women in the development process. Clear data on the role of women in each sector are difficult to get, partly because of the general shortage of data, and partly because in Afghanistan, as elsewhere, women's role and contributions to the economy are often invisible and undervalued. However, using the information available, it is possible to demonstrate the key role women play currently as well as point towards potential contribution in the future.

The report suggests that under the prevailing social, economic and political conditions, the main areas of intervention in support of gender equity and gender mainstreaming should be:

- ✓ substantial strengthening of women's employment in the health and education sectors, which will have direct positive effects on girls' school enrollment, women's access to health services, maternal mortality and general child and family health
- ✓ strengthening women's involvement in agricultural and livestock production in the form of extension and training, credit facilities and expanding marketing opportunities
- ✓ development of socially acceptable skilled and unskilled employment opportunities for women in the urban sector in response to the high level of poor female-headed households
- ✓ legal reforms to remove gender inequities within Family Law, in terms of marriage, marriage age, divorce and inheritance
- ✓ collection of adequate sex-disaggregated data across all sectors to document women's and men's involvement and to enable monitoring of future developments and effects of investments

These interventions call for a series of actions, including creation of an appropriate institutional framework to support women's training, market linkages, access to credit and child care facilities, schooling infrastructure including incentives designed to reduce the drop out rate for girls, and maternal health care facilities to be spread out into remote rural areas. Given the current state of data in and about Afghanistan and the limited experience with a variety of actions, it is not possible to quantify precisely the impact of these actions. However, on the basis of other countries' experience, it can be shown that not only would the well-being of women, men and children improve as a result, but that this will also have positive growth outcomes from a country perspective. While it is difficult to quantify the benefits precisely, given the current magnitude of gender disparities it is almost certainly the case that at the margin the direct and indirect benefits of policy actions to address these priority areas are much greater than the costs.



Chapter-1

Introduction



Introduction

In 2001, Afghanistan embarked upon a new beginning with the overthrow of the Taliban regime, recognizing anew the contribution of the female half of its society. After years of minimal involvement of women in public life, the Bonn Agreement called for specific attention to the role of women and established a dedicated government structure for this purpose, the Ministry of Women's Affairs. The core strategy for women's advancement is defined as 'gender

Progress towards gender equality is a critical issue for us.First we will adopt measures to restore those rights to our women and girls that they were denied because of the segregationist policies of the Taliban and the threat to their personal security during periods of conflict. To support this, we will need to create women's specific opportunities that will allow them to catch up with men and boys. Particular concerns are the re-instatement of women in employment and income-earning opportunities, up-grading women's professional knowledge which has fallen out of date because of their years of exclusion, and enhancing their management skills and familiarity with modern technologies in the work place. These will call for specific programs directed to enhancing the capabilities of our girls and women.

After two decades of conflict, destruction and massive displacement of its population, Afghanistan is faced with unprecedented challenges and the daunting task of building institutions and capacity to forge a pathway to progress, outlined in the strategic document *Securing Afghanistan's Future* in March 2004. The successful conduct of the Constitutional Loya Jirga in December 2003 and the Presidential Election in October 2004 constituted important milestones in this regard.

Despite Constitutional gender equality before the law since 1964, the legal framework guiding Afghan women's lives consists of a mixture of customary law, Islamic Law and traditions, all of which stress the complementarities of male and female roles more than their equality. Within this larger framework, there are considerable regional differences in the position of women and even more, between rural and urban areas and between educated and non-educated groups in society.

Objectives and Process of the Country Gender Assessment

In support of the government's efforts and policies, the World Bank has prepared this Country Gender Assessment to identify critical areas in which gender-responsive actions are likely to enhance growth, poverty reduction and human well-being. The extent of gender discrimination in Afghanistan is pervasive, and the present report focuses on a few key sectors deemed particularly important for both short and long-term reconstruction. Gender gaps in Afghanistan are widespread in health, in education, in economic opportunities and in power and political voice. While women and girls bear the direct cost of these inequalities, and the negative effects are felt throughout the society. The Country Gender Assessment makes the case that improvements in women's situation are essential for the reconstruction of the country - and that sizable investments in this regard will yield large benefits.

Political and social turmoil allowed little research and national level data collection in the past few decades, and few empirical analyses have been conducted, leading to a gap in systematic knowledge about gender relations beyond anecdotal evidence. As a result, the approach chosen here has been to assemble a situational report covering the main issues in key sectors of gender inequality such as health, education, agriculture, employment and legal rights. The objective of this Assessment is to identify the key issues relating to gender mainstreaming in the Afghan context, notably to women's involvement in the development process both as beneficiaries and contributors. In order to achieve this objective, the approach chosen has been on the one hand to document the unequal access to services, resources and economic opportunities and the major obstacles to achieving equity, and on the other hand to document women's significant but largely ignored, contribution to the household and national economy, and the constraints to expanding women's economic role. This documentation of the equity deficits for women in various sectors is put in a wider gender perspective in the chapter on women's legal position and voice inside and outside the household, where some of the most deep-rooted factors behind the present gender inequity

can be identified in the form of women's highly unequal legal position and almost complete lack of voice at all levels of society.

As part of the process of formulating the Country Gender Assessment, a workshop was held in Kabul in September 2004, to which a wide range of international and national agencies¹ active in the various sectors covered by this report were invited. The goal was to gather information about good practices and lessons learned and to benefit from the insight gained by various agencies that have been working in Afghanistan in some cases for more than two decades and whose expertise too rarely is drawn upon outside their own programs. Almost three quarters of the participants were Afghans, which also reflects the considerable local competence which has been built up over the years.

The Gender Context

In Afghanistan, the role of women and their position in the society are inextricably interlinked with the national destiny. Women are symbols of family honor but also carry the burden of embodying the national honor and aspirations of the country. Gender has thus been one of the most politicized issues in Afghanistan over the past 100 years, where many reform attempts rightly or wrongly have been condemned by opponents as un-Islamic and a challenge to the sanctity of the faith and family. Notions of honor and shame underpinning cultural norms and practices emphasize female modesty and purity and define men as breadwinners and the protectors of the family. In 1929, the reformist king Amanullah's government fell soon after he tried to impose social reforms, including the abolition of purdah (separation and veiling of women) and establishment of coeducation. It took another 30 years before Mohammad Daoud, the then Prime Minister, in 1959, officially encouraged women to give up purdah and challenged the view that full veiling was a religious obligation. In the late 1970s, the leaders of the Communist (PDPA) regime which took power in 1978 pushed new reforms including elimination of the "bride-price"

¹ International Rescue Committee, CARE, Swedish Committee for Afghanistan, Afghanistan Institute of Learning, Medica Mondiale, International Medical Corps, OXFAM, Relief International, Swedish Committee for Afghanistan, Terre des Hommes, BRAC, CARE, Coordination for Humanitarian Assistance, Mercy Corps, Parwaz, Relief International, UNIFEM, WAO. Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission, Afghan Women's Education Programme, Afghan Women's Network, Afghan Women's Skills Development Programme, International Organisation for Migration, Medica Mondiale, Afghan Liberal Party, All Afghan Women's Union, D..E..D, GTZ, , Irshad Women and Children Association, Joint Election Membership Board, Swiss Peace, UNDP/MoRRD

and forced adult education for women, which caused much of the rhetoric of the opposition to the PDPA-regime and Soviet occupation, to be formulated as a "*jihad*" and as protecting women from communist forces bent on destroying their purity and Islamic values. Men's primary role thus became as Defenders of the Faith (*mujahedin*) and Protectors of the Honor of the Nation and the Family. In the 1990s, women's rights in Afghanistan remained a divisive issue. When the PDPA regime finally collapsed in 1992, and a coalition of *mujahedin* parties was installed in Kabul, decrees were announced instructing women to observe *hijab* i.e. covering of the head, arms, and legs. Local commanders in other cities announced similar decrees.

During the conflict and civil war in the 1980s and 1990s, particularly between 1992 and 1995, armed factions turned the traditional norms of honor and shame into weapons of war, engaging in rape and sexual assault against women of opposing groups as an ultimate means of dishonoring entire communities and reducing people's capacities to resist military advances.² In response, concerns about women's security led to the imposition of ever stricter interpretations of what constitutes socially acceptable behavior, supported by the most conservative reading of the holy scriptures. This development culminated under the Taliban regime whose views on gender denied women any role outside the immediate family and resulted in policies violating the very honor and sanctity of the family which they claimed to defend and relegated gender discourse to the realm of religious interpretations.

The definition of gender roles is so central in Afghan society and culture, that any perceived or planned changes require consultations not only with the household but also with the larger community. Men and women to a large extent share the same cultural ethos and values, including their conception of gender roles, and they seek to validate these within their communities. Years of turmoil have furthermore left communities to their own devices, strengthening the inherent distrust of external authorities and increased reliance upon conservative values. The remarkable social cohesion, which has brought the Afghan population through the years of turmoil with less scars than could be expected, also includes strict social norms and control of conformity with these norms. Hence any perceived attempt of inducing change requires solid consultation with and consent among the affected communities.

² Amnesty International, 1999

Box 1 : Chronology

1880-1901	Amir Abdur Rahman. Attempt to abolish levirate, raise the marriageable age, and grant women divorce rights under specific circumstances.
1901-1919	Amir Habibullah. Putting a ceiling to marriage expenses. Killed in 1919.
1919	Third Anglo-Afghan War whereby Afghanistan regained full independence.
1919-29	King Amanullah. Afghanistan's first Constitution and legal reforms introduced. Attempt to modernize society and culture. Marriageable age for women raised to 18 years and for men 21 years. Polygamy abolished.
1929	King Amanullah exiled as a result of tribal uprising against reform policy. Civil War.
1930-33	King Nadir Shah. Installed with support of tribes and religious establishment. Assassinated in 1933.
1933-73	Zahir Shah reigns.
1949	Election reforms result in liberal parliament. Marriage Law passed. Purdah is made optional; women enter University, workforce and government.
1950	Crackdown on nascent opposition and end of liberal experiment. Sardar Daoud becomes Prime Minister in 1953. Rapprochement with the Soviet Union.
1963	Daoud forced to resign, mainly because of authoritarian style of government and strained relations with Pakistan. Constitution, and first nationwide election.
1963-73	Constitutional monarchy and parliamentary democracy installed. Failed due to lack of enactment of the Constitution and not legalizing political parties. Formation of Communist groupings and of Islamist groupings, which increasingly clash at the university campus.
1971-73	Severe drought resulting in famine mainly in Central Afghanistan. Government perceived as inactive and unable to manage the crisis.
1973	Coup d'etat by Sardar Daoud assisted by Communist group Parcham. Reform policy started, and restrictions on political opponents.
1975	Attempts of Islamic insurgency failed. Clamp down on Islamic opponents.
1977	New Constitution. Civil Code and Penal Code (based on Shari'a but no <i>hadd</i> punishments). Women get equal rights to institute divorce cases. Family Courts established. Clamp down on communist opponents.
1978	Saur Revolution: Bloody coup against President Daoud by united communist groups Khalq/Parcham (PDPA). Nur Mohammad Taraki as Prime Minister. 1977 Constitution abrogated. Decree No. 7 confirms equal rights for women, regularizes dowry and marriage expenses and forbids forced marriages. Decree No. 8 introduces comprehensive but ill-founded land reform.
1979	Widespread popular insurgency, followed by brutal suppression. Infighting in the PDPA and Taraki killed and replaced by Hafizullah Amin. In December, 50,000 Soviet troops invade the country. Hafizullah Amin is killed, and Barbrak Karmal installed as President.
1989	Withdrawal of Soviet troops. Mujahedin control most of countryside, increasing number of refugees escape fighting and destruction. Over the next decade, the number of refugees reaches around six million.
1992	President Najibullah agrees to step down and mujahedin coalition takes over Kabul. In-fighting over the next couple of years leads to the destruction of Kabul and Kandahar. Decree on <i>hijab</i> issued restricts women's public appearance.
1994	Emergence of Taliban.
1996	Taliban conquer Kabul, Najibullah executed. Ban on women's employment, girls' schools closed, full purdah imposed on women and ban on men shaving their beards.
1998	Taliban conquer Mazar-i-Sharif, the last major city controlled by Northern Alliance.
1999	The UN imposes sanctions against Afghanistan. Drought hits the country.
2001	Third year of drought. Taliban regime falls. Signing of Bonn Agreement. Hamid Karzai chosen leader of Interim Government.
2004	New Constitution agreed by Loya Jirga.
2004	Presidential Election.

Today, the estimated population of Afghanistan is around 24 million and it has a per capita GDP close to US\$315 (including the opium economy), which is one of the lowest in the world. Moreover, the country's social indicators are among the worst in the world, and with large gender gaps³. Afghanistan has some of the worst health, educational and economic indicators in the world. Two decades of internecine warfare have led not only to a breakdown of infrastructure and services, but also have destroyed the livelihood of the people and contributed to the downward trend of women's rights. By the end of 2001 government services, including health care and education, had stopped functioning, resulting in significant negative impacts particularly on women and children. According to the National Human Development Report (2004) Afghanistan ranks 173th out of 178 countries in the UN's Human Development Index and when in terms of its Gender Development Index only Niger and Burkina Faso are placed lower. However, parallel with the gradual development of democratic institutions since 2002, there is growing awareness at all levels of Afghan society that economic and social progress requires contribution by all active and able human resources including women.

Policy and Institutional Framework to Advance Women's Status

The Ministry of Women's Affairs (MoWA) was established by the Bonn Agreement and was tasked by the interim and transitional governments of Afghanistan with responsibility for advancing the role of women. Although new as a Ministry, a precedent institution for the promotion of women has existed since 1928, when 'Society for the Protection of Women' was established. As a quasi-government body, the 'Society' has faded or flourished with the changing values of the Afghan political leadership throughout the 20th Century.

The MoWA carries responsibility for leading and coordinating government efforts to advance the role of women in all spheres of social life so that gender disparities are reduced and progress towards gender equality is gradually achieved. Ultimately it aims to lead and coordinate inter-ministerial gender policy and strategy development, but recognizes a prior need to build understanding and capacity throughout the government for gender analysis to promote broad-based ownership and commitment. Its key functions are advocacy, technical support, coordination, and monitoring of progress. It attempts to influence sector strategies, lobby national institutions, and support project

³ World Bank, 2004, p.3

implementation. The MoWA's intended key structural relationship with line ministries is via Gender Focal Points, and by deputing members from its Advisory Group on Gender⁴ (AGG) to the national program Consultative Groups (CGs) which coordinate planning and strategies. The National Development Framework defined gender mainstreaming as the core strategy for advancing women's role, and from its inception the MoWA's priority concerns have been female education, reproductive health, economic development and legal access. The MoWA formulated a five-pronged strategic plan for 1383-7, and beyond. This was presented to the National Budget Committee as the MoWA 1383 *Public Investment Program in Advocacy and Support for the Integration of Gender into the NDB*.

The MoWA has drawn upon its linkages with donors, UN and NGO agencies, largely but not exclusively through the AGG, to advocate and mobilize support for women around critical events. These have included the initiation of a common 'Platform For Action' for the Constitutional Loya Jirga and capacity building of candidates; practical suggestions to the

Table 1: MoWA 1383-7 Strategic Objectives for Women's Advancement

Capacities	second chance, accelerated learning for women and youth ⁵
Opportunities	skills building for sustainable income and poverty reduction, with rural focus
Empowerment	promoting women in decision-making in governance structures
Security	promoting legal and physical protection for women, including from exploitation
Capacity building	for gender analysis, policy development and budgeting in key ministries

⁴ The Advisory Group on Gender is a one of six cross-cutting groups (others being Human Rights, Environment, Humanitarian Affairs, Monitoring and Evaluation and Counter Narcotics) whose members are deputed to the national program Consultative Groups to represent their specific concerns and needs. Its membership is proposed by government to be around 15-18 persons drawn from among those donors and UN agencies who had stated interest in the cross-cutting issue, plus appropriate civil society representation. The AGG has become a larger amorphous interest group which increases potential for information sharing, but reduces potential for decision making on policy or strategy direction

⁵ With special focus on 15-24 year olds, to address Millennium Development Goal on Gender Equity

Electoral Commission on inclusion of women in voter registration and support to civic education for women at provincial level. However, its capacity to fulfill its mandate to support mainstreaming of gender analysis and policy direction is still weak and its role as advocate with national institutions on generic socio-cultural gender issues that are not the specific responsibility of any particular body remains somewhat discreet

Non-Government Organizations (NGOs)

Both international and national agencies have invested in women's programs for almost a decade, and several offer sound field-based experience and have qualified female staff, who worked illegally under *burqas* and with *mahrms* throughout the years of women's exclusion from all public life. Such women today represent a new category of working women, many of whom have the important experience of working effectively in rural areas. Their support to women's health, education, community processes and income generation have now been augmented by a plethora of new NGOs bringing additional support by way of micro-finance, small business development, human rights education, legal advice and literacy, advocacy, and protection of women and girls at risk. The Agency Coordinating Body for Afghan Relief (ACBAR) is the largest network of international and national NGOs and has established its own NGO Gender Advocacy Group; it has also nominated a representative from international and a national women's NGO as members of the MoWA AGG.



Chapter-2

Health



Women in Afghanistan have an extraordinarily high risk of dying during pregnancy and childbirth and the highest maternal mortality rate in the world. Pre-natal care, maternal health care facilities and trained health personnel are virtually non-existent in large parts of the country, contributing to a very high percentage of preventable maternal and child deaths. Besides the lack of access to and quality of health services, other factors such as lack of adequate food, shelter and clean water, low marriage age, high fertility rate and lack of spacing of child births contribute to the extremely poor health of Afghan women.⁶

The root causes of the alarming health indicators in Afghanistan are poverty and the two decades of warfare that stalled economic and social progress and led to destruction of livelihoods and high levels of disability. This situation has had a particularly negative impact on the health and mortality of women and children, but there does not appear to be any evidence of deliberate gender-based discrimination within the health sector - the exception being the Taliban insisting on separate medical facilities for males and females, which increased the de facto differences in service provision to men and women. However, factors such as the prevailing poverty and lack of health facilities and trained staff, along with the predominant cultural attitudes related to purdah norms, have had a devastating effect on women's reproductive health. This chapter focuses on the material circumstances and constraints affecting women's health in terms of access to and availability of health

⁶ Physicians for Human Rights, 2002

services, as well as on prevailing socio-cultural norms which act as constraints to improvement in the situation.⁷

Maternal and Child Mortality

Surveys conducted in 2002 by UNICEF and the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in four provinces of Afghanistan estimated a maternal mortality rate (MMR) of 1,600 per 100,000 live births. There are indications of large variations across geographical areas; Kabul for example, had an estimated MMR of 400 per 100,000 while Badakhshan with 6,500 per 100,000 had the highest MMR ever reported globally⁸. In comparison, the MMR is 500 in Pakistan and only 76 in Iran.⁹ The proportion of deaths of women that were due to maternal causes ranged from 16% in Kabul, where at least one maternity hospital was functional at the time of the survey, to 64% in Badakhshan, where health care access was profoundly limited. While the lifetime risk of maternal death is 1 in 15,¹⁰ the UNICEF/CDC study also showed that when the mother of a newborn infant dies, the child has only one chance in four of surviving until its first birthday.

Available health data indicate that while the present health situation in Afghanistan is very poor, for the larger part of the population there has not been an actual deterioration as compared to pre-war times. Despite of the devastating effect of the war and recent drought on all public services in Afghanistan, its pre-war health statistics were even worse. The under-5 mortality has fallen from 360 in 1960 to 260 in 1990 and 257 in 2002. Likewise, maternal mortality rate has fallen from 3,070 per 100 000 in 1978¹¹ to the present 1,600,

⁷ **Sources:** The UNICEF Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey 2003 has national coverage - but does not cover the nomadic population. Even then, there are considerable uncertainties regarding actual figures, e.g. population figures are estimated on the basis of growth rates estimated from the 1979 census data, which did not achieve full coverage due to the resistance to the PDPA government. Other important source materials are the *MICS 2000*, which covered only East Afghanistan, and more detailed, but regionally limited studies such as *Maternal Mortality in Afghanistan* (2002), covering four provinces, *Maternal Mortality in Herat Province* (2002) and *Women's Health and Human Rights in Afghanistan* (2001), a population based study in four geographic areas, both by Physicians for Human Rights and the *UNICEF and the CDC Nutrition and Health Survey in Badghis Province* (2001)

⁸ Maternal Mortality in Afghanistan: Magnitude, Causes, Risk Factors and Preventability. The survey covered rural and urban settings (Kabul, Laghman, Kandahar and Badakhshan), gathering information on an estimated 85,000 women

⁹ <http://unicef.org/infobycountry/index.html>

¹⁰ Wilma Doedens/WHO/RHR/21-09-01

and life expectancy has increased from 38 years (1970) to 43 today. Overall, there have been modest improvements since the 1970s, which presumably are largely due to the scattered service provisions by NGO during the years of conflict. More than 80% of functional health facilities have some form of NGO involvement, but the coverage is far from even, with a concentration in the urban areas and areas near the Pakistan border. The key point is that in terms of its social indicators, especially female social indicators, Afghanistan has not participated in the dramatic improvements that have occurred over the past several

Table 2: Reproductive Health Indicators

Indicator	Year	Data
Under-5 mortality rate	1960	360
	1990	260
	2002	257
	2003	172
Total fertility rate	1960	7.7
	1990	7.1
	2002	6.8
	2003	6.3
Crude death rate	1970	26
	2002	22
Crude birth rate	1970	51
	2002	48
Life expectancy at birth	1970	38
	2002	43
	2004	44.5*
Maternal mortality	1985-2003	1600

Source: www.unfpa.org/emergencies/afghanistan/factsheet.htm, www.unicef.org/infobycountry/afghanistan_statistics.html

** National Human Development Report, 2004*

¹¹ World Bank, 1978 p. 37, quoted in Hunte, 1978

decades in most developing countries, even very poor countries. Thus Afghanistan has fallen much further behind most of the rest of the world and hence is starting from an extremely low base in terms of progressing toward the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

A study in Herat province concludes that the extraordinarily high number of deaths of women during pregnancy and childbirth are largely preventable. They are a direct consequence of the very young marriage age for women and girls (according to UNIFEM, 54% of girls under the age of 18 are married),¹² poor health and nutrition, too-frequent childbearing, and virtually no access to gynecological and obstetrical services.¹³ Small, anemic mothers with undeveloped pelvic bones are at greater risk of obstructed births with devastating consequences for both mother and baby, and they may not withstand pregnancy or the usual blood loss during delivery. Other studies similarly point out that 40% of child deaths are due to the preventable causes of diarrhea and acute respiratory diseases.¹⁴ There are no national figures for average marriage age for girls, but in this study it was found to be the age of 15 (range 5-39). The Tufts University study based on *NRVA* data informs us that 16% of girls are married under the age of 15; while 52% are married by the time they become 18 years old.¹⁵

The main causes of maternal mortality are hemorrhage (24%) and obstructed labor (32%).¹⁶ To this should be added the extremely high prevalence of anemia (*MICS2000* recorded 55%-91% for the Southern and Eastern regions).¹⁷ More than 90% of women give birth at home and most of these births occur without the assistance of a trained health attendant. Even if a primary health care clinic is available, 70% of these are unable to provide even basic mother and child services, while 90% of hospitals do not have the complete equipment to perform C-sections. Furthermore, there is widespread reluctance to let women be treated by male health workers, particularly in the case of obstetrical and gynecological matters. In this

¹² www.unifem.org; *Women's Leadership Role in the Reconstruction of Afghanistan*

¹³ Physicians for Human Rights, 2002, p.5. A population-based survey of 4,486 women from 34 urban and rural towns and villages in seven of thirteen districts in Herat

¹⁴ AREU, 2003, p.48, note 62

¹⁵ Feinstein International Famine Center, 2004, footnote 153

¹⁶ UNICEF/CDC, 2003

¹⁷ *Multiple Indicators Cluster Survey (MICS)*, carried out in 2000 in Eastern Afghanistan

context, the fact that in 2002 nearly 40% of basic health facilities did not have female health care workers, only 24% had at least one female physician, 21% had at least one female nurse, and 20% had at least one midwife¹⁸ becomes even more salient. Where female health workers are present, women's utilization of health care facilities increases dramatically, as is the case in the MSF-supported clinic in Baharak (Badakhshan Province), staffed with two male and two female doctors.¹⁹ Such clinics in Eshkeshem and Dashta Barchi reported similarly high usage by women.²⁰

Even with availability of female medical staff, pregnant women may not receive the necessary medical attention. In Eshkeshm it was reported that most problems during birth were taken care of by relatives or by a mullah, who would provide amulets or written verses from the Koran.²¹ In the same vein, the Herat study found that besides women's limited access to health facilities, other factors also contributed to the very high incidence of maternal mortality. These included: (1) women and their families do not know the warning signs of potentially lethal conditions during pregnancy and childbirth and therefore cannot avert potential complications; (2) women often cannot afford to pay for health care services even when they know they are in danger; and (3) lack of transportation makes it impossible for the sick woman to reach the health clinic in time (*ibid.* p. 3). Since women normally would consult their male family members about seeking medical care, and in any case may need their assistance for the travel to a health clinic, the lack of male knowledge and understanding of reproductive health care is as important an obstacle as women's own lack of awareness.

However, the massive rehabilitation effort undertaken since 2002 is beginning to show results. The first comprehensive study on women and children conducted by the Afghanistan Central Statistics Office and UNICEF in 2003, revealed that estimated infant mortality has fallen from 165 to 115 deaths per 1000 live births and under-5 mortality from 257 to 172 deaths per 1,000 live births.²² Furthermore, provision of the Basic Package of Health Services

¹⁸ UNICEF/CDC/Afghan Ministry of Public Health, 2002; AREU, 2003, p. 48, note 62

¹⁹ Strategic Monitoring Unit, 2001, p.36. Sample drawn from 45 villages

²⁰ Reilly, B et al, 2004

²¹ Strategic Monitoring Unit, 2001, p.36-40

²² UNICEF, 2004. The survey is based on interviews with 20,800 individual households in 32 provinces across the country

Box 2: Training Skilled Birth Attendants: Successful NGO Interventions

Since 1999 the **International Medical Corps** (IMC) has trained a thousand birth attendants and basic health workers (female and male), in the rural areas of Paktia, Paktika, Bamiyan, Nangarhar, Kandahar and Kabul. Recognizing the inevitable limitations to managing of birthing complications, agencies have also established referral systems.

In urban areas, home-based midwifery is proving to be a successful mode of providing access for poorer women to skilled maternal and infant care. **Terre des hommes** has been operating in the poor districts of Kabul City since 1995 and more recently has expanded to Kandahar. Midwives are selected by urban district communities themselves, and identify clients on a 'knock on the door' basis. While evaluation reports indicate a reduction in maternal mortality over time, the close community relationship has also enabled Terre des hommes to address more sensitive issues such as domestic violence and child abuse. This is supported by its membership of the Ministry of Women's Affairs' national women's protection network which includes specialized agencies such as Medica Mondiale (for psychosocial counseling, legal support), and the Ministry of Women's Affairs Legal Department (for gender-based violence, child abuse).

(BPHS) has expanded to about 60% of the population, and 95% of children are vaccinated against measles and polio. Female staff are now available at 60% of health facilities. While these are very positive indicators, there is still a long way to go.²³

Gender Differences in Mortality

According to the newly published *National Human Development Report* (2004), life expectancy at birth in Afghanistan is 44.5 years which is about the lowest in the world, comparable to Niger, Burkina Faso and Guinea-Bissau and only Sierra Leone is lower. The neighboring countries of Pakistan and Iran have life expectancy at birth at 60.8 and 70.1 years respectively. Never-the-less, women do have an overall biological advantage in survival at birth, but this survival advantage is extremely small and in the region, only Nepal ranks below Afghanistan, in that respect. The sex ratio in South Asian countries (with the exception of Sri Lanka), favors men - the starkest indicator of women's poorer health status compared to men's. In Afghanistan too, there are 94 women to every 1000 men - but the sex ratio is the same as in Bangladesh and India. Thus, Afghanistan falls well within the regional patterns in overall gender differences in mortality. However, survey data from Badghis on age-specific death rates

²³ *Afghanistan - Progress of Provinces*. Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey 2003. Central Office of Statistics & UNICEF, May 2004. The survey is based on interviews with 20,800 individual households in 32 provinces across the country

shows that women's death rates in Afghanistan in the reproductive period are particularly sobering and - as women are almost three times as likely as men to die in the 15-49 age group:

Table 3: Age-and Sex-specific Death Rates in Badghis (2001)

Age Group (years)	Males	Females	Both sexes
0-5	2.86	2.23	2.51
5-14	0.20	0.15	0.18
15-49	0.18	0.47	0.32
50+	0.76	0.69	0.73
All ages	0.69	0.74	0.72

* Number of deaths/10 000 population /day

Source: UNICEF & CDC Nutrition and Health Survey Badghis Province, 2001

There is little information on gender discrimination within the household in matters of nutrition and access to health care, but it seems that breastfeeding is discontinued earlier for girls than for boys: breastfeeding was discontinued by age 12-15 months for 6.7% of boys, but for 11% of girls.²⁴

Fertility and Family Planning

In Afghanistan, there is a marked preference among parents for a newborn to be a boy rather than a girl, which is also a common feature in all the neighboring countries. In the 1970s, before the conflict started, a ratio of almost 2 to 1 favoring boys was reported,²⁵ and rural women reportedly desired two times as many offspring (boys and girls) as their urban counterparts. In a number of countries of East and South Asia, this has resulted in sex-selective abortion resulting in a dramatic shortfall of women. Fortunately there are no such indications from Afghanistan, where the technology for sex determinations is not yet available, and where the high fertility rate recorded, partly a result of the young marriage age,

²⁴ *Moving beyond 2 Decades of War: Progress of Provinces*. Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey 2003. Afghanistan. UNICEF/Central Statistics Office, 2003

²⁵ Hunte, 1978, p.20

reflects the fact that numerous children (boys and girls) are seen as a blessing. Having many children functions as a social safety net in a country with no welfare system, related to power in a society where differences are settled through violence and provision of livelihood support by offspring. Children are important as a female status symbol since a woman's status in the family improves according to the number of children and especially boys she has borne,²⁶ and failure to conceive is sufficient grounds for a husband to demand divorce. Recent surveys among Pashtun women noted that the desired number of children ranged between seven to ten, while economic considerations and deterioration in the mother's health have been found to be common reasons for men and women to limit their fertility.²⁷ The current fertility rate is recorded as 6.8, and although high it still constitutes a reduction from the pre-conflict rate of 7.7 recorded in 1960. To this picture should be added accounts of a virtual 'baby boom' in the refugee camps, where Dupree reported a fertility rate of 13.6.²⁸ It is not known how comprehensive and representative a survey is behind these data, but an increase in fertility rates during a period of war and conflict is however not unusual in any culture.

The high fertility rate results in high annual population growth roughly estimated at 3.8% per annum during 1992-2002 according to one source.²⁹ This is problematic at the individual household level due to the strain it exerts on maternal health and on the economic resources and well-being of the household. The *NRVA* survey reveals that family size is inversely related to per-capita expenditures, and poverty as such also correlates with schooling, literacy and health.³⁰ At the national level, rapid population growth will reduce the benefits to the people (in terms of average per-capita income) of any given rate of economic growth.

Family planning was introduced to Afghanistan in 1970 when the Department of Family Planning was established in Kabul, with branches extending to 20 provinces a year later. Women in particular did recognize that many child-births and lack of spacing of births took a

²⁶ Azarbaijani-Moghadam, 2002, p. 25

²⁷ Afghanistan Working Group, 2001. The surveys in question refer to the Review of Family Planning in two regions- Eastern and Southeastern; Swedish Committee for Afghanistan, 1999; Reproductive Health Survey and Ibn Sina and P. Hunte, 1985

²⁸ Dupree, N.H, 1998

²⁹ www.who.int/country/afg

³⁰ World Bank, 2004:15

heavy toll on their health, while the male response to family planning was considerably cooler. The contraceptive prevalence rate reported in 1972/73 by UNFPA was 2%. During the 1980s, little attention was paid to birth control measures, and the Department of Family Planning was closed down with the advent of the *mujahedin* government in 1992.³¹ In this context the very low prevalence of contraception reported recently (Table 4) is not surprising, and it probably reflects both the lack of awareness of and lack of access to contraceptive methods.

While contraceptive prevalence in Afghanistan is only 1/5 of the prevalence in Pakistan and 1/11 of the prevalence in Bangladesh, recent surveys have indicated that women in Afghanistan and their husbands are keen to limit family size. Where women do want to limit

Table 4: Contraceptive Prevalence in South Asia and Select Muslim Countries

	Contraceptive Use Among Married Women 15-49, All Methods (%)	Contraceptive Use Among Married Women 15-49, Modern Methods (%)
Afghanistan	5	4
Bangladesh	54	43
India	48	43
Indonesia	60	57
Iran	74	56
Malaysia	55	30
Nepal	39	35
Pakistan	28	20
Sri Lanka		
(Data prior to 1997)	66	44

Source: PRB 2004 World Population Data Sheet

³¹ Afghanistan Working Group, 2001

fertility, access to contraception is the most important determinant. Estimates of contraceptive prevalence vary substantially, and as in other countries, regional differences are great, with 2% contraceptive prevalence in the South-eastern region compared to 8.4% in the Eastern region are reported by the MICS 2000.

While data on reproductive decision-making is lacking in Afghanistan, available evidence seems to show that while women may openly have little say with respect to the number of children they bear,³² in fact they do have a high unmet need for contraception. The Tufts University survey in 2003 also reported high interest in birth control among women in Badghis, Herat, Kabul, Kandahar and Nangarhar, and several women stated that their husbands would support their use of contraception.³³ Even more striking is a survey of 360 women in 12 areas of Kabul by Terre des homes, which reported that 98% women expressed interest in receiving contraceptives and 96% confirmed that their husbands would agree with family planning methods.³⁴

Knowledge of family planning and its use vary considerably between rural and urban areas. According to the MICS 2003, 21% of urban but only for 6% of rural women below 50 years of age reported using contraception.³⁵ Available figures also indicate that the awareness and usage of contraceptive methods are far higher in the Western part of the country than in other areas. Thus, women in Herat province are more likely to use contraception than those in Kabul, and even very poor and under-serviced provinces like Farah and Nimroz figure well above the national average when it comes to use of contraceptive methods. Even a very gender conservative province like Kandahar ranks high in terms of both awareness and use of contraception. The reason may be that many Afghans from the western areas were refugees in Iran, where they may have been exposed to the Iranian family planning campaign. (This may also explain why Bamiyan Province in Central Afghanistan ranks high regarding awareness of contraception, since many Shi'as from the central areas chose to become refugees in Iran).

³² *NRVA*, 2003

³³ Feinstein International Famine Center, 2004: 86-87

³⁴ Terre des homes survey about family planning in Kabul city. Press release, 25. April, 2002

³⁵ *Moving beyond 2 Decades of War: Progress of Provinces*. Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey 2003. Afghanistan UNICEF/Central Statistics Office. Afghanistan Transitional Authority, 2003

Box 3: Models of Family Planning - Iran and Bangladesh

Iran forms an interesting comparison to Afghanistan in terms of fertility and family planning. After the Islamic Revolution in 1979, there was no family planning program, as the dominant view was that Islam does not encourage people to practice family planning. After the start of the Iran-Iraq war, political and religious authorities advocated having more children to strengthen the nation by increasing the population. As a result, in 1988 the population growth rate in the country stood at 3.9% per annum, i.e. comparable to the present Afghan growth rate. This caused serious alarm among policy-makers, who realized that the costs of this burgeoning population were going to far exceed the government's capacity to provide adequate food, education, housing and employment. Hence policies were drastically changed, paving the way for one of the most successful family planning programs ever seen. Iran's population growth rate was within a decade more than halved to 1.47%, through a combination of strong political commitment backed up by religious leaders, integration of family planning with primary health care, and comprehensive sex education at both school and community level for both men and women. Parallel with this development has been an equally dramatic rise in literacy levels - for women rising from less than 25% in 1970 to more than 70% today.³⁶

Bangladesh shows equally significant results in terms of controlling population growth and over the last 20 years has reduced total fertility rate from about 6.4 to 3.3 births per woman at present. In addition, contraceptive use by women under the age of 50 rose from 3% to 54%. These results were achieved by building health and family welfare clinics all over the country, training more than 35,000 female workers to take family planning advice directly to the people's doorsteps, and using mass media campaigns to generate awareness about family planning. The prerequisite for these achievements was above all a strong political commitment.³⁷

Poverty, Conflict and Gender: Other Effects on Health

In the Health Sector, a picture of a largely under-serviced rural population is apparent. In 1976-77, there were a total of 176 government-licensed trained nurse-midwives in the whole of Afghanistan, and of these 150 were in Kabul Province alone.³⁸ Today the ratio of basic health centers to population ranges from approximately one per 40,000 people in the central and eastern regions to approximately one per 200,000 in the south. Nineteen districts have no health facilities at all.³⁹ In 38% of the rural districts countrywide, the majority of people (>50%) have no access to even the most rudimentary forms of healthcare. The slightly more

³⁶ Larson, J., 1998; Peterson, S., 2004

³⁷ www.EngenderHealth.org/itf/bangladesh

³⁸ Hunte, 1978, p. 17

³⁹ Waldman and Hanif, 2002

than half of the respondents in the Tufts University survey in Badghis, Herat, Kabul, Kandahar and Nanagarhar provinces, who were able to access some form of health care had to spend on average three hours of travel time to reach the health facility. Hence patients tend to wait until their health problems become severe before they travel to medical centers.⁴⁰

The uneven geographical distribution of health facilities is made even worse by the uneven distribution of female health workers. In 2002 there was one female nurse per 58,988 of population in Balkh Province, while there was one female nurse per 470,500 populations in Ghor Province. In Wardak, 59,000 members of the population shared one midwife, while 475,100 people shared one midwife in Helmand. In Nimroz, Paktika and Khost Provinces, there was not a single basic health facility providing delivery care services with a female physician, doctor's assistant, nurse or midwife.⁴¹

More than half of all hospitals in Afghanistan are located in Kabul and therefore serve only about one fifth of the entire population. According to WHO, approximately 2,700 of the 3,900 physicians and 600 of the 990 midwives work in Kabul, leaving the remainder of the country with few trained health care professionals.⁴² In fact, it was recently estimated that a trained health care provider attended fewer than 8% of deliveries countrywide,⁴³ and there is one doctor per 1,000 population in Kabul, whereas there is only one per 100,000 population in Bamiyan.⁴⁴ In the case of rural health facilities which are fortunate enough to have a medical officer, he/she may only have limited medical education completed decades ago. The number of doctors plus the 7,000 medical students may exceed the number of trained community health workers in the country, which means that the primary health pyramid has been stood on its head, with a focus on curative care, whereas notions of public health are poorly developed.⁴⁵

The congruence of poverty, conflict and prevailing gender norms has also had other adverse effects on the health of women and men. The extreme anti-women policies of the Taliban

⁴⁰ Feinstein International Famine Center, 2004, p.74-78

⁴¹ UNICEF and CDC, 2002

⁴² *WHO Afghanistan*, 2001. (Unpublished)

⁴³ *UNDP Needs Assessment Report. V. Social Protection, Health and Education: Health*, www.UNDP.org. Accessed Feb. 14, 2002, quoted from Physicians for Human Rights, 2002, p. 10

⁴⁴ MOPH-WHO, 2001

⁴⁵ Waldman and Hanif, AREU, 2002, footnote 12

regime from the mid-1990s to 2001 and the years of conflict have, for example, increased women's risk of mental diseases.⁴⁶ For example, study of maternal mortality in Herat⁴⁷ points out that a large percentage of Afghan women suffer from major depression or other mental health problems related to trauma and/or the suffering of losses in their lives. Evidence from Medica Mondiale, a German-based international organization supporting women in war and crisis situations, reports that a Herat hospital last year recorded 160 cases of attempted suicide among girls and women between the ages of 12 and 50. This is widely recognized by aid workers as being an underestimation of the problem due to reporting bias in favor of urban areas.⁴⁸

Nutritional deprivation stemming from food insecurity and issues of occupational health are some of the other issues of concern. The MICS 2000⁴⁹ reported 14% of children as being severely underweight and 25% as severely stunted, although gender disaggregated data is not available. In 2002 UNICEF and CDC conducted a child nutritional assessment in Badghis, covering 507 households, where chronic malnutrition was reported for 62% of boys and 54% of girls, while prevalence of acute malnutrition was 6-7% for both.⁵⁰ Finally, specific work-related problems affect women and men differently. For instance, girls who work at carpet looms from an early age face problems of neurological and eye related problems due to the constant high concentration required.. Other evidence on the health effects of conflict and poverty is lacking, and this is a critical area for further research.

Innovative Programs Carried Out by NGOs

NGOs have shown the way to effective health service delivery in the difficult conditions of Afghanistan, albeit on a small scale. A variety of approaches have been adopted to provide access for rural women to reproductive health information and services. Mobile clinics are used by agencies like Relief International (RI), which serves five districts of Nangarhar province traveling

⁴⁶ Editorial by Paul Bolton and T.S. Betancourt: Mental Health in Post War Afghanistan, discussing the following new studies: B.L. Cardozo et al: Mental Health, Social Functioning, and Disability in Postwar Afghanistan, and Willem F. Scholte et al: Mental Health Symptoms Following War and repression in Eastern Afghanistan. JAMA News Releases, Aug. 3, 2004

⁴⁷ *Maternal Mortality in Herat Province. The Need to Protect Women's Rights*. Physicians for Human Rights, 2002:7

⁴⁸ Esfandiari, 2004

⁴⁹ Multiple Indicator Baseline carried out by UNICEF , and CIET International

⁵⁰ *Nutrition and Health Survey Badghis Province Afghanistan*, February - March 2001, UNICEF and U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)

Box 4: Men as Partners in Health Service Delivery

In Afghanistan, perhaps more than in other cultures, it is important to involve men as key partners in health service delivery. In some programs, preventive health and hygiene, seasonal risks such as malaria and basic reproductive health information are transmitted to rural men and women via members of health committees by both OXFAM and Swedish Committee for Afghanistan (initiated during the Taliban regime and attached to all its clinics). Members comprise village-level community health workers or traditional birth attendants as well as individuals selected by the villagers themselves. Linked to a clinic, these men and women are trained by the clinic professionals, usually on a monthly basis, and return to their home communities to share the new information. To facilitate women working in rural areas of Badakhshan and Bamiyan, OXFAM has adopted a policy of hiring couples and/or making provision for accommodation and basic costs of a *mahram* - an approach which was used with success by several agencies (e.g. DACAAR) to deliver health education during the Taliban times. For rural village-level work, consultation with mullahs and elders has been instrumental in gaining acceptance not only of program content but also of men allowing village women's participation.

from its capital in Jalalabad. The Afghanistan Institute of Learning (AIL) covers three districts of Kabul province from its Mir Bacha Kot based unit. Both agencies integrate direct care with preventive approaches implemented by non-health professionals in order to optimize outcomes for women. Over the past five years AIL has trained 10,000 female teachers to provide health education to women in their communities. Capitalizing on its relationship with the Ministry of Education (as an education provider) its mobile clinics also implement specialized health seminars in schools for both adults and for children. Relief International expands its outreach for preventive health education through literacy teachers as well as community health workers, and focuses its mobile clinic in those districts where women are participating in a non-formal education program.

Policy Implications

Afghanistan's health indicators are among the worst in the world, in particular, when it comes to child health and women's reproductive health. Under-five mortality rate of 257, infant mortality rate of 165, and estimated maternal mortality rate of 16 (all per 1000 live births); rate of chronic malnutrition (moderate or severe stunting) around 50%; and very high rates of disability due to polio⁵¹, cerebral palsy, and conflict (including landmines) are figures that tell the sorry state of affairs. Recent surveys have revealed that almost half of all deaths among women of reproductive age are a result of pregnancy and childbirth - and that more than $\frac{3}{4}$ of these deaths are preventable. Among children, diarrhea, acute respiratory infections and vaccine preventable illnesses likely

⁵¹ Polio used to be a major cause for disability, but polio eradication efforts over seen in the past couple of years have been very successful

account for 60% of deaths, and among adults tuberculosis results in an estimated 15,000 deaths per year, with 70% of detected cases being among women. Life expectancy is estimated at 43 years.

A range of factors contributes to this situation. On the supply side it is:

- ✓ Lack of access to basic health facilities - only 40% of the population is in the coverage areas of basic health facilities, and only 9% of rural households surveyed in 2003 reported a health facility in their village⁵²
- ✓ Lack of female staff at the existing facilities particularly in rural areas
- ✓ Strong rural-urban disparity in availability of health facilities
- ✓ Lack of roads, transport and security reduce mobility and access
- ✓ Public health system, including provision of community health workers, is highly underdeveloped compared to the curative care in the primary health system
- ✓ Lack of clean drinking water and sanitation facilities
- ✓ Lack of access to family planning information and contraceptive methods

Social factors, which negatively affect women's health and their inability to access proper health care are:

- ✓ Low marriage age resulting in too many and too frequent child births
- ✓ Poverty
- ✓ Reluctance to let women seek medical assistance from male health workers
- ✓ Lack of awareness of maternal health care among men and women
- ✓ Insufficient awareness of health hygiene and nutrition
- ✓ Lack of awareness of family planning

⁵² World Bank, 2004, p. 105



Chapter-3

Education



Education

The Government of Afghanistan has clearly stated its commitment to further girls' education:

*The evidence is clear that investment in education, with special effort to include girls, is the single most important investment in development that any country can make. Girls that have been to school transform their country as they grow up. They tend to marry later and have fewer children who are more likely to be healthy. They help increase household income and in turn they insist on access to education and health care for their own children.*⁵³

In 2001 the overall adult literacy rate in Afghanistan was estimated at 36%, while for adult women it was 21%,⁵⁴ and the subsequent Multiple Indicators Cluster Survey (2003) revealed large urban-rural discrepancies for both sexes.⁵⁵ These figures show that Afghanistan's education indicators are among the worst in the world,

⁵³ *Securing Afghanistan's Future*, 2004: 13

⁵⁴ Adult literacy rate relates to the age group 15 and above. *The EFA 2000 Country Assessment Report* underlines that data on education is not only scant and incomparable, but the reliability of available data is also highly questionable. The conclusion is thus that the data presented at best is indicative of certain trends relating to status of education in Afghanistan.

⁵⁵ According to the nation-wide Multiple Indicators Cluster Survey (2003), the estimated national illiteracy level (persons aged >15 years) is 56.8% for men and 85.9% for women, but with large urban-rural discrepancies for both sexes (40% vs. 63.9% for men and 71.9% vs. 91.9% for women).

and that girls and the rural population are especially disadvantaged and have been for decades.⁵⁶

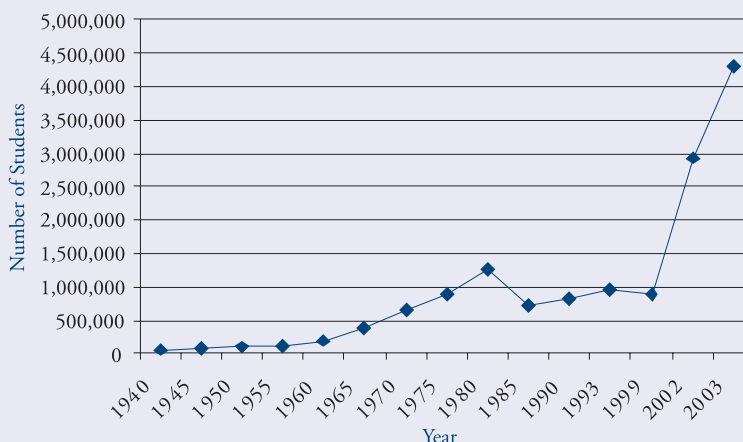
This chapter summarizes trends in key education indicators for Afghanistan, and also lays out the main constraints to education for girls in particular. While a significant leap in enrollment has taken place since the collapse of the Taliban rule, almost half of school age children are still not enrolled. Furthermore, there are huge regional disparities, as well as rural-urban disparities. A number of supply factors that affect children's and, in particular, girls' access to school are the lack of school facilities, in particular girls' schools and girls' secondary schools; lack of female teachers; and insecurity. Several socio-cultural and political factors are also identified as having a negative impact on girls' enrollment and school retention, such as poverty, targeting of girls' schools by opponents of the present government, and culturally determined notions of education as 'unnecessary' or 'harmful' for girls. Considerable regional and ethnic heterogeneities exist within Afghanistan – not only in the matter of constraints, but also in the matter of opportunities. Thus for example in some regions women's mobility is more constrained than in others. However, it is difficult to separate the issue of cultural barriers to mobility from those of security – how much of the constraint on women's mobility, and allowing girls to walk to school, is related to the poor security situation – which may in fact improve as political stability comes about? How much of the demand is constrained by the lack of supply of female teachers, which in turn may be related to security as well as differing cultural norms?

After the downfall of the Taliban, Afghanistan saw the highest school enrollment rates in its history, with more than 4.3 million children enrolled in primary and secondary school in 2003,

⁵⁶ **Sources:** The source material with the widest coverage is the *Education for All (EFA) 2000 Country Assessment Report*, which is compiled every decade. The 2000 report is based upon published school data for the first half of the EFA decade, and additional school data that were collected in 1999 from 25 international NGOs/Aid Agencies supporting basic education in 22 of the 29 Afghan provinces. Pre-conflict national-level educational statistics are available in Hunte (1978). *The Report of the EC Rapid Reaction Mechanism Assessment Mission (Education)* by Lahr and Azarbaijani-Moghaddam (2002) is also national in scope and adds post-2001 data based on consultations and field visits. The survey of Girls' Education (Altai Consulting December 2003) is based on 300 in-depth interviews in 6 geographical areas (Kabul urban, Kabul rural, Herat, Bamiyan, Khost and Kandahar). The Feinstein International Famine Center, Tufts University, has in its Human Security and Livelihoods of Rural Afghans, 2002-2003, used the NRVA (Nationwide Risk and Vulnerability Assessment) survey data and added up with primary research of its own in Badghis, Balkh, Herat, Kabul, Kandahar, and Nangarhar.

of which one-third were girls. In the age group 7-12 years, 67% of boys and 40.5% of girls were enrolled,⁵⁷ with such a high level of girls' enrollment in particular representing an impressive achievement. Likewise, the number of schools has increased from 3,800 in 2002 to 7,134 currently.⁵⁸ The Asian Development Bank (ADB) reports that demand for girls' education is surging and that the girls' schools that opened for informal winter sessions in all parts of the country after the defeat of the Taliban were overflowing in 2003, even in traditional Pushtun areas like Griskh in Helmand Province, where 500 girls showed up on the first day. At Kabul University, more than 18,000 students took the admissions examination at the beginning of 2002. Thus demand for education is high, but there are also serious constraints.

Figure 1: The Growth of Student Enrollment: Grades 1-12 (1940-2003)



Source: World Bank, 2004b, *Technical Annex*, p. 5

The spurt in enrollment still represents only a little more than half of school-age children and 40% of the girls. Moreover, these figures hide dramatic regional and urban-rural disparities, with girls representing less than 15% of total enrollment in nine provinces in the east and south. According to a UNO/ESSP survey conducted in 1993, 70% of all primary school

⁵⁷ Central Office of Statistics & UNICEF, 2004

⁵⁸ Planning Department, Ministry of Education, 2003 (quoted from Report Card: Progress on Compulsory Education (Grades 1-9), 2004

students were from rural areas, but with vast differences by region and province. Among the 70% students enrolled in rural areas, 65% were boys and only 5% girls, while in among the 30 % enrolled in urban areas the corresponding figures were 23% boys and 7% girls.⁵⁹ There are also glaring regional imbalances – in 1990 36% of all primary school facilities were located in the northern region, serving only 27% of the population. By 1999, the situation had become more balanced, with the under-served Southern region having increased its share from 11% to 26% of schools, while the West continued to be under-served.

In the South Asian regional context Afghanistan lags behind in education by a substantial margin. While the average number of years of schooling for girls is 2.5 years in Pakistan and 1.8 years in Bangladesh, in Afghanistan it is less than one year. Similar disparities between Afghanistan and the rest of the region exist in average years of education for men as well. This has a serious bearing on skill levels and productivity – so essential for longer-term development and especially when a country is undergoing a reconstruction process.

The Policy Context

The historical evolution of education policy and its politicization has been a major factor in the uneven development of education in Afghanistan. Successive governments and political groups have used education, and girls' education in particular, as a launching pad for ideological and political maneuvering. Years of conflict have taken their toll on educational infrastructure and access. In 1935, primary education was officially made compulsory and free and was constitutionally guaranteed in 1964, but serious nationwide implementation was lacking for many years. In 1975, several years prior to the conflict (which started with the Saur Revolution/PDPA coup in 1978), only 11.4% of Afghanistan's population of six years of age or above were literate, and a significantly greater proportion of males were literate than females. In urban settings 14.8% of males were literate while for rural women the figure was as low as 0.6%.⁶⁰

During the 1960s and 1970s, schools and educational institutions turned into ideological battlefields between the increasingly vocal Communist and Islamist movements,⁶¹ and after

⁵⁹ Lahr & Azerbaijani-Moghadam, 2002:14

⁶⁰ Hunte, 1978

⁶¹ Olesen, 1995

the Communist coup in 1978, the school system became one of the first victims of the long conflict. Initially, the PDPA government pushed hard for increasing enrollment rates and also launched ambitious adult education programs, which enthusiastic local party workers tried to force village women to attend. The government utilized the school system to consolidate its position and even sent more than 50 000 Afghans to the Soviet Union for training and education⁶². A major backlash was unavoidable and sparked revolt against the government; large parts of the existing educational infrastructure were targeted and destroyed by the *mujahedin*. Similarly the PDPA, and later the *mujahedin* used the education system to further their political ends, even more than had pre-1979 governments. The quality of education suffered, and the rural areas were hardest hit with many teachers killed and schools destroyed. In 1983, the Afghan Foreign Minister admitted in the UN that 50% of schools in Afghanistan were destroyed, and by 2003 the ADB estimated that 80% of all school buildings at all levels had been damaged or destroyed .

The majority of formal educational institutions in Afghanistan are sex-segregated from grades 1-12. In 1974 only 12.3% of schools (all levels) were girls' schools, and the geographical disparity was also great – 30% of the country's lycees were located in Kabul, and in some provinces there were no lycees at all for girls.⁶³ In 1979, as few as about 3,500 schools existed in all,⁶⁴ and only 13.1% of these were girls' schools. The PDPA government's pro-active secular education policy led to an increase in access, so that by 1990 almost 20% of primary schools were girls' schools. However, the ongoing conflict after the collapse of the PDPA government in 1992 resulted in a worsening security situation and in a sharp reduction in both boys' and girls' schools. In 1993 only 13.2% of schools were girls' schools - a return to the situation of 15 years earlier.⁶⁵ Access to education deteriorated further from 1994 onward as a result of the Taliban's draconian policies on girls' education and female employment. By 1996-97, female education was prohibited and only 2% of Directorate [government-managed] schools were girls' schools, while many boys' schools were gradually transformed into *madrasas* (religious schools) in the same period. Despite these official

⁶² *The EFA 2000 Assessment Country Reports. Afghanistan.* www.2.unesco.org/wef/countryreports/afghanistan/rapport_1.html

⁶³ Hunte, 1978, p.24

⁶⁴ A school run in a village generally covering primary grades 1 to 3 only. These schools often had no 'formal' building (Lahr & Azerbaijani-Moghadam, 2002)

⁶⁵ *The EFA 2000 Assessment Country Reports. Afghanistan*

restrictions, female primary education continued to some degree, supported by NGOs. When these schools are included, a proportionate increase in girls' schools appears, reaching almost 14.5% of total number of schools in 1999, mainly due to the increase in NGO-funded girls' schools in the Eastern and Central regions where the Taliban's closing down of the Directorate managed [government-managed] girls' schools was felt the most strongly. The resulting proportionate increase in girls' schools during the 1990s was also partly due to the reduction in the number of boys' schools.

Enrollment Rates

As pointed out earlier, enrollment rates remained very low until the mid-1960s, when a gradual increase took place over the next decade but still retaining huge gender and urban-rural disparities. In the 1980s improvements of opportunities in urban areas occurred as a result of the PDPA government, while education in rural areas suffered due to the conflict. The 1990s saw collapse of the urban infrastructure and a decrease in government responsibility across the country for the education sector. The Taliban's accession to power resulted in the virtual closing down of girls' school as indicated in the GER for girls of 5% in 1999 (excluding enrollment in informal schools). With women comprising over 70% of qualified teachers in Kabul, the Taliban ban on women working also had a negative impact on boys' education, while on the other hand creating a large pool of otherwise unoccupied women teachers available to teach girls in the informal sector.⁶⁶ Support provided by the assistance community was piecemeal and project-oriented with little

Table 5: Gross Enrollment Ratios by Gender

	1990	1995	2003
Gross Primary Enrollment Rate (Female)	19	32	40
Gross Primary Enrollment Rate (Male)	35	63	67
Gross Primary Enrollment Rate (Total)	27	49	54
Girls Enrollment Share, Primary (%)	34	32	34

Source: World Bank, 2004c, p. 15, UNESCO, 2000

⁶⁶ (E/CN.42/200/18, para 35, quoted from Barakat & Wardell, 2001 p. 29)

standardization, but it still led to an increase in facilities and enrolment in rural areas with the development of new and innovative community-support models. On the other hand lack of standardization might have enabled agencies to work with communities to develop alternatives.⁶⁷

The increasing enrollment during the 1990s resulted in a more even distribution across regions – with the eastern border areas showing a higher rate of increase than the Northern and Central areas which used to have the highest enrollment. This was due to the higher level of involvement of NGOs in the eastern regions.

The enrollment figures for 2003 (age group 7-12 years) reveal a very positive development with 67% of boys and 40.5% of girls enrolled.[but only an 8% increase over 1995, if the figures are to be believed.]⁶⁸ However, a close look at the net enrollment in disaggregated form reveals continuing stark regional and gender disparities. The net enrollment rate exceeds 80% for both boys and girls in Kabul, Herat and Mazar cities. Moreover, in three locations – Herat City, Badakhshan Province, and Herat Province⁶⁹ — girls’ net enrollment exceeds boys’. On

Table 6: Changes in Distribution of Enrollment among Regions during the EFA (Education for All) Decade

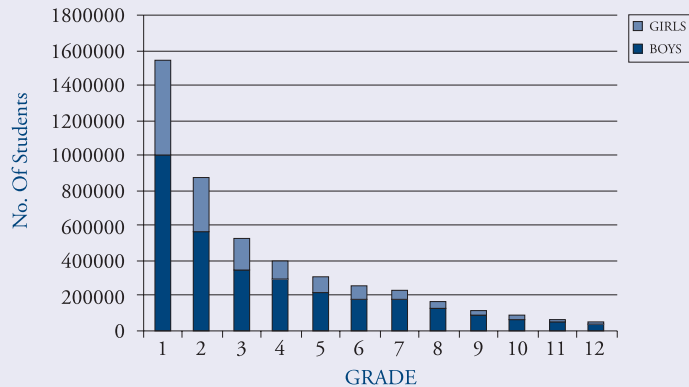
Regions	1990	1999
Northern	22.4%	18.5%
Eastern	5.8%	17.4%
Western	9.6%	3.4%
Southern	5.2%	23.8%
Central	57%	36.8%

Source: The EFA 2000 Country Report, 2000, Afghanistan, UNESCO

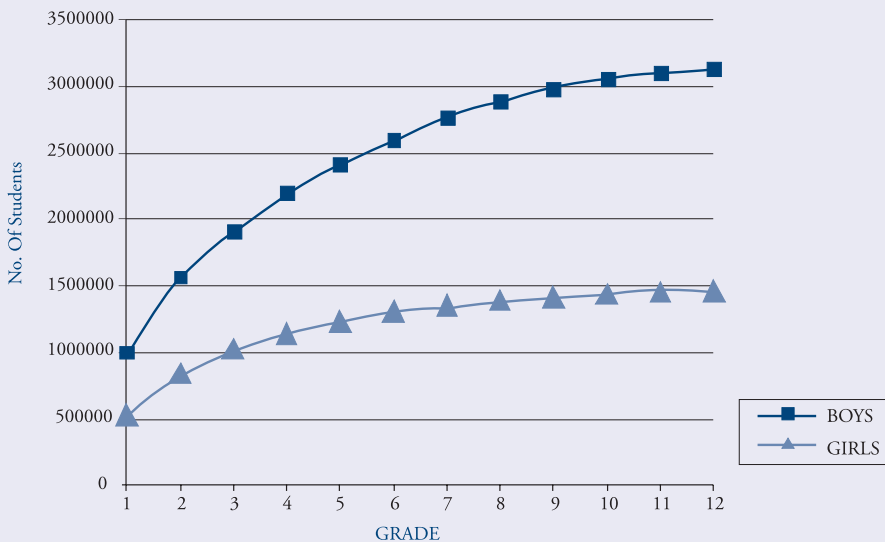
⁶⁷ Global Movement for Children Afghanistan Working Group, 2001

⁶⁸ Central Office of Statistics & UNICEF, 2004

⁶⁹ Net enrollment rate is 87% in Kabul city (boys 92%, girls 81%), 86% in Herat city (84% boys, 88% for girls) and 85% in Mazar-i Sharif (86% boys, 85% girls). World Bank Annex, 2004

Figure 2: Student Enrollment by Grade: 2003

Source: Planning Department, Ministry of Education

Figure 3: Cumulative Enrollment by Gender

Source: Investing in Afghanistan's Future. Education Policy Note. World Bank, (Draft, June 2004: p5)

the other hand, in the three provinces of Badghis, Helmand and Uruzgan, the total net enrollment rate is less than 20%, with the ratio for girls being as low as 1% in Badghis and Zabul provinces.

Secondary school enrollment is low for both boys and girls, but there has been considerable improvement since the end of 2001, when there were almost no girls in secondary schools, largely as the Taliban authorities had closed the majority of the limited number of girls' schools available. A few girls attended some single sex secondary schools in north-eastern Afghanistan, in areas beyond Taliban control.⁷⁰ Access to secondary education was and is constrained by a number of factors, particularly the number of and location of secondary schools. In the past many district centers had one boys' and one girls' secondary school, catering mostly to urban students. The NRVA indicates that secondary school opportunities for girls are still severely limited in rural areas.

Retention Rate

As discussed earlier, enrollment rates are only part of the story, with retention in school being another major part. In 1978, Hunte reported extremely high school dropout rates, and attendance that dropped drastically as educational levels increased; at the lycee level only 11.9% of the males in this age group were enrolled as compared to a very low 1.4% for females of lycee age.⁷¹ Recent assessments show that was little improvement in retention until 1999. Evidence from the 1990s indicates that problems of low retention affect all rural students irrespective of gender considerably more than urban students, but also that girls missed out on the great increase in retention rate which boys benefited from – doubtless due to all the upheavals related to girls' education through the 1990s. No recent information is available on the number of students per secondary grade, nor on completion rates through grade⁷². In 1993, roughly three students out of 100 enrolled in grade 1 completed 12th grade²⁰. In 1999, the average drop-out rate was 57% for grades 1-5, with 74% of girls and 56% of boys dropping out.

⁷⁰ Lahr & Azarbaijani-Moghadam, 2002, p.13

⁷¹ Hunte, 1978, p.25

⁷² Survey University of Nebraska at Omaha, 1993 (quoted from Lahr & Azarbaijani-Moghadam, 2002, p. 16)

Table 7: Survival of Educational Cohorts in the 1990s

Area & Gender	1. grade		2. grade		3. grade		4. grade		5. grade		6. grade	
Rural boys	1000		680		570		460		350		270	
Rural girls	1000		500		430		290		190		150	
Urban boys	1000		600		550		490		420		340	
Urban girls	1000		540		450		350		270		210	
	1993	1999	1993	1999	1993	1999	1993	1999	1993	1999	1993	1999
Overall boys	1000	1000	660	936	570	728	470	577	370	494	290	440
Overall girls	1000	1000	540	908	440	689	320	426	230	351	180	261

Source: The EFA 2000 Assessment Country Reports. Afghanistan. UNESCO, 2000

Tertiary Education

Kabul University was established in 1932, but until 1961 only men could receive a higher education in Afghanistan. In 1961 all faculties were made coeducational, and the University of Nangarhar was established with Kabul Polytechnic following soon after. Twelve percent of university students were female in 1975.⁷³ After 1978, Kabul University suffered persecution of its staff, of which 35 faculty members were executed and another 260 fled the country. On the other hand, institutions of higher education were opened in Balkh, Herat, Kandahar, Faryab and Kunduz – a total of 12 institutions led by Kabul – as part of the PDPA government's policies to expand tertiary education. Until the civil war of the 1990s, this system of higher education was largely intact. In 1990, UNESCO estimated that there were 1,342 teachers at the tertiary level, one quarter of whom were women, and that women made up one-third of the student body. Since then, however, most university professors left the country although the University of Balkh continued to function through the 1990s, and in 1996 it still boasted of 40% female students and 20% female faculty.⁷⁴

⁷³ Kalmthout, 2001

⁷⁴ Asian Development Bank 2003, p. 20; Interview with local authorities in Mazar-i-Sharif, 1996

In the 1980s the first private university was established for Afghan refugees in Pakistan with Arab support and linked to one of the seven *mujahedin* parties recognized in Pakistan. Other 'universities' were opened by political parties in Pakistan, one of them exclusively for females, but they were all closed down in 1998 by the Pakistani authorities due to lack of government certification. In 1999, the closed universities were combined into one institution functioning under Pakistani supervision, and the campuses were opened for 1,500 males and 700 female students.⁷⁵

Currently, according to the Ministry of Higher Education, in the academic year 2002/03 more than 11,000 students were enrolled at the universities in Kabul and the provinces, of which 30% were women. More than half the students were enrolled in the four institutions of higher education in Kabul, and comparatively more female students were enrolled there than in the provinces. In Fall 2003 enrollment increased to 31,000 (19% were female students) and all 17 higher institutions were operating.⁷⁶ However, women from the provinces who choose to pursue higher education in Kabul face the problem of limited access to dormitories.⁷⁷ While women thus are coming back into the educational institutions, they are still vastly under-represented within the Ministry of Education, where only 4% of senior management staff (heads of departments, deputies and the minister together) are women.⁷⁸

Barriers to Female Education

The MICS of 2003 addressed the issue of why children (aged 7-12) are not enrolled in school.⁷⁹ Both urban and rural families refer to 'distance' as the most common reason for not sending their children to school. While 29% of rural parents refer to the inadequacy of the school facility and 24% to the lack of a separate facility, i.e. lack of a girls' school, as the reason for not sending their child/daughter to school, these are far less common reasons for the urban population, which are better served with school facilities. However, 'domestic work' and schooling 'not necessary' are quite frequently mentioned by both urban and rural households,

⁷⁵ Dupree, N. June 8, 1999. Global Movement for Children Afghanistan Working Group., June 2001.

⁷⁶ World Bank 2004c.

⁷⁷ National Human Development Report, 2004, p. 69

⁷⁸ Lahr and Azerbaijani-Moghadam, 2002, p.24

⁷⁹ Central Statistics Office and UNICEF, 2004

Table 8: Cause of not Enrolling in School for Children (7-12) 2003

	Distance (%)	Inadequate facility (%)	No separate school (%)	Domestic work (%)	Not necessary (%)	Household income (%)
Urban	25.5	9.6	13.6	18.7	20.1	10.1
Rural	39.5	29.0	23.6	16.9	14.1	6.6
National	37.2	25.8	22.0	17.2	15.0	7.1

Source: Afghanistan- Progress of Provinces. Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey 2003. Central Office of Statistics/UNICEF, 2004

interestingly enough with a higher frequency among urban households. These figures are a clear indication to planners that lack of access and lack of adequate facilities, including lack of separate girls' schools, constitute the main obstacles to school enrollment. Other factors are lack of toilets and water in schools; ADB reports that approximately one-third of the schools have no identifiable water source, and less than 15% have toilets for children's use,⁸⁰ and that this discourages particularly older girls' from remaining in school. Considering the dramatic regional disparities in enrollment, this calls for a major effort in expanding the coverage of quality schools for boys and girls all over the country. As far as the urban population is concerned, increased attention should be paid to the households' domestic demands on children's labor and ensuring that the curriculum will convince parents that education is not only relevant but also 'necessary'.

Female Teachers

Girls' enrollment is determined by not only the availability of girls' schools but also whether there are female teachers. The urban-rural distribution of teachers was (and still is) highly uneven in favor of urban areas, particularly in the capital and other cities in the north and west of the country. The educational system as well as the teachers fell victim to the conflict and insecurity following the PDPA coup d'état in 1978. Schools were destroyed and many teachers killed because they were seen as representing the values of the Communist government.

⁸⁰ ADB, 2003, p. 8

**Table 9: Proportion of Female Teachers over Time
(Primary and Secondary School)**

Year	Total number of teachers	Female teachers % of female teachers	Estimated number
1979	37 000	20%	7 400
1990	16 500	59%	9 700
1993	23 200	13%	3 000
2000	27 200	10%	2 700

Source: The EFA 2000 Assessment Country Reports. Afghanistan. UNESCO, 2000 p. 12, Lahr & Azerbaijani-Moghadam, 2002, p. 10

During the 1990s, the absolute number of employed teachers decreased and the proportion of female teachers was also reduced, with the result that in 2000 the number of female teachers was between one half and 1/3 of what it had been in 1979. Of these, more than 60% were working outside government schools (in NGO run schools). There are now over 70,000 teachers, 28% of whom are women (i.e. about 19,600), but geographical and rural-urban disparities are still glaring: For example in the Khost province there are 1,374 teachers for grades 1 to 9, and only nine of them are women.

Higher education experiences a similar gender disparity among its teaching staff. In 2003 around 12% of professors in 2003 were female, but while they constituted 1/6 of professors with a Bachelor degree only 1/13 of professors with a Master degree were

Table 10: Number of Female Teachers for grades 1-9

Region	Female Teachers	Total no. of Teachers
Kabul	7,028	8,821
Badakhshan	569	3,315
Zabul	37	860
Khost	9	1,374

Source: Planning Department, Ministry of Education, 2003 - quoted from Report Card: Progress on Compulsory Education (Grades 1-9), 2004: Table 3

Table 11: Professors by Gender and Qualification (2003)

	Male		Female		Total	
Bachelor	840	46%	158	9%	998	54%
Master	650	35%	61	3%	711	39%
Ph.D.	130	7%	2	0%	132	7%
Total	1620	88%	221	12%	1841	100%

Source: World Bank, 2004c

female. Only 2 female professors had a PhD as compared to 130 male professors (see Table 11).

Marriage and Social Norms

The norm of early marriage creates both social and legal impediments to girls' education. Not only do girls drop out due to increased domestic responsibilities after marriage, but a law passed in the mid-1970s prohibiting married women from attending high-school classes was upheld by the Afghan government in September 2003, and defended on grounds that it was meant to "protect unmarried girls from learning explicit details about sex from their married classmates".⁸¹ Therefore, to cater to the needs of married girls in Kabul, the Ministry of Education set up a vocational high school in the Ministry of Women's Affairs. In 2004, the law was finally changed by a Presidential Decree at the initiative of the Ministry of Women's Affairs, lifting the prohibition against married women attending high school. With the formal obstacles removed, married girls may still face difficulties in remaining at school alongside unmarried girls, since objections from other parents and religious leaders could be anticipated according to various school administrators in Kabul.⁸²

Traditionally, the majority of Afghan parents are largely indifferent toward or even hostile to formal education for girls. It was and is believed by more conservative parents that formal

⁸¹ From the Afghan Recovery Report, produced by the Institute of War and Peace Reporting, November 5, 2003

⁸² Bahgam & Mukhatari, 2004, p.14-15

education will corrupt girls and that this will poison the whole community, as women and girls are the repository of family 'honor'.⁸³ There has also been a perception that formal schooling is irrelevant in preparing children in rural communities for their gender roles as adults – girls as wives and mothers, boys as 'providers' and guardians.

In Badakhshan, which is characterized by a comparatively favorable climate toward girls' education, girls still tend to drop out around puberty, because they are kept at home to prepare for marriage (which may happen at an age as young as 13). Sometimes, it is because families cannot afford the *burqa* for an older girl, which she may need to wear on her way to school. If the girls manage to stay in school after the onset of puberty, then they seem more likely to complete grade 12 than boys. This may be because the economic opportunity cost of keeping boys in school is greater than for girls.⁸⁴ But even where social attitudes are not against education for girls, for rural girls their comparatively limited mobility curtails this theoretical right. Girls typically do not travel or even walk beyond the village, and this results in enormous difference between boys and girls in terms of their ability to access secondary schools in their district (ibid, p. 35).

All of these issues apart, the record enrollment of girls after the fall of the Taliban is a clear indicator of the present positive attitude among the majority of the population toward education, especially for girls. The girls' schools that opened for informal winter sessions in all parts of the country after the defeat of the Taliban were overflowing, even in very traditional areas like Giriskh in Helmand Province where 500 girls showed up the first day.⁸⁵

In 2003 UNICEF commissioned a study of the attitudes behind the low priority granted to girl's education in Afghanistan and the ways to change this situation.⁸⁶ The findings were encouraging in the sense that they revealed the clear positive values attached to education by men and women across all social groups, as well as the general understanding that education

⁸³ Schutte, even states on the basis of field research in three urban settings that not only may girl's education be considered harmful, but bride-price may even fall if the bride is too knowledgeable since "nobody wants to marry an educated woman"

⁸⁴ *Badakhshan*. Strategic Monitoring Unit, 2001, p. 33-34

⁸⁵ ADB, 2003

⁸⁶ Altai Consulting, 2003

for boys as well as for girls should be considered a religious duty. Among the school-age generation, the wish for education was unanimous, and interestingly enough, boys were also strongly in favor of girls receiving education. Among the constraints, the main factors identified were resistance to education from illiterate parents, notably fathers, as they were seen as the key decision-makers regarding children's permission to go to school. Other important impediments identified were lack of access, i.e. girls' schools located far away, girls' domestic work, and poverty, i.e. the family can not manage without the labor/income of the son or daughter, or cannot afford the expenses associated with schooling such as school uniforms, stationery and the like. In general, the study found that poverty plays a dominant

Box 5: Innovations and Entry-Points to Enhance Girls' Education

The International Rescue Committee has negotiated with local communities to get their consent for older girls' continuation to secondary levels by community provision of transport to a secondary school in an adjacent village, teaching single-grade cohorts at separate times in a classroom, and using a house-based location in the village. Similar community consultations, stressing the virtues of education for all age groups, facilitated agreement regarding provision of learning opportunities for young women who missed out or failed to complete schooling during years of conflict and political exclusion.

The Afghanistan Institute of Learning has found that communities consider linkage to health education appropriate. Community suggestions to include domestic studies or health care in addition to the required academic subjects for girls at secondary level perpetuate what are considered appropriate gender roles. But they also offer the opportunity to introduce good practice in terms of efficiency and outcomes and thus may help meet female practical gender needs. The broad concept of domestic sciences have in other conservative societies helped to pioneer female education, apart from its potential impact on household health and nutrition. Community-derived concepts of *relevance* have also determined content of 'second chance' education for girls. In the experience of International Rescue Committee, the focus has been on incorporation of life and livelihood skills appropriate to the local context.

The acute shortage of female teachers has been dealt with by the Swedish Committee, CARE and International Rescue Committee, by accepting a community-selected woman (and particularly for younger age groups, possibly a man) with lower levels of education (usually 9th Grade) and providing teacher training supported by regular on-job monitoring and mentoring. While the weakness of this approach may be the quality of education, it has nevertheless reinstated female education disrupted by conflict or lack of qualified teachers, and more remarkably, it has also facilitated first-time ever female education in a number of rural communities. For example, CARE has achieved 48% female participation among its students in Logar, Paktia, Paktika, Wardak and Ghazni. Emphasis is given to frequent and effective monitoring to support and maintain quality.

role in school attendance for both boys and girls alike, and specific gender considerations (e.g. negative attitudes towards girls' education) play a secondary role.⁸⁷ The reasons may be that better-off families are less dependent on the labor and income-earning abilities of their children, have better access to transportation which in particular for girls improves chances of school attendance, and may be better educated themselves and thus put more emphasis on education for their children.

In spite of the generally positive attitude among the population, girls' education is still a contested field, which was illustrated during late 2002 when a number of arson and other violent attacks took place in girls' schools in a number of provinces. These attacks are often preceded by written threats warning against girls attending school.⁸⁸ This is reminiscent of the 1950s, when ultra-conservatives protested against girls' education, and even assaulted female students in Kandahar by throwing acid at them. Similar reactions against unveiled female students in short skirts were found in Kabul in the 1970s.⁸⁹ Today, however, it is not only a few isolated incidents, but also a recurrent phenomenon reflecting both the poor security situation and that the general level of violence in society is far higher. If this trend is allowed to continue, parents will not dare to send their daughters to school in the more remote and politically volatile parts of the country.

Policy Implications

The adult literacy rate in Afghanistan is estimated as 36%, while for adult women it is estimated as being 21%⁹⁰ (2001). A significant leap in school enrollment has taken place during the last couple of years, and four million children are now at school, one-third of them girls, but this still represents only a little more than half of school-age children and 40% of girls. These figures hide dramatic regional disparities, with girls representing less than 15% of total enrollment in nine provinces in the east and south. Besides gender disparity, such figures also reflect the persistent huge urban-rural disparity. Furthermore, the schools are also struggling with high dropout rates, which in 1999 were reported as 74% of girls for grades 1-5 as compared to 56% for boys.

⁸⁷ Feinstein International Famine Center, 2004

⁸⁸ E/CN.6/2003/4

⁸⁹ Dupree, N., 1998

⁹⁰ World Bank, 2004. Adult literacy rate relates to the age group 15 and above

The Government aims to achieve a 100% enrollment rate for school-age children as part of the MDG targets for 2015, with girls' enrollment share targeted at 50%. The constraints to girls' education stem from both demand and supply side factors, but these are mutually reinforcing.

Various obstacles to achieving this goal exist. On the supply side it is:

- ✓ Lack of school facilities, especially girls' schools in rural areas. Girls' Secondary schools are particularly few and scattered
- ✓ Lack of security which combined with distance prevent especially girls from accessing school facilities
- ✓ Lack of female teachers, particularly in rural areas
- ✓ Outdated curricula, including their portrayal of gender roles
- ✓ Poor or lacking school facilities including lack of water supply and toilet facilities
- ✓ Married girls are prevented from ordinary enrollment

Various social factors have a negative impact upon girls' school enrollment as well as on their retention rate when they reach puberty:

- ✓ Security: Political opponents to the present government are targeting girls' schools and carrying out terrorist attacks such as bombing or burning down schools, and campaigning against female education
- ✓ Poverty: Although education is free, for poor families the cost of school uniform and stationeries along with loss of girls' domestic labor/income earning activities is a disincentive to enrollment
- ✓ Low marriage age and high fertility rate mean that marriage and motherhood is seen as girls' only 'career' perspective, causing low school enrollment and also low retention rates, as married girls are withdrawn from school
- ✓ Parents', particularly illiterate fathers', negative attitude towards girls' education

In terms of policy implications, the required interventions, as in the case of health, are clear – provision of educational infrastructure, including buildings and separate schools for girls, textbooks, learning materials, recruitment and training of female teachers, building a relevant curriculum and provision of adequate water and toilet facilities. Mechanisms to promote not only enrollment but also quality and retention would also be extremely important. As in the case of health, what is more important is *how* these interventions will be delivered and policy implemented on the ground. Here it is important to address two related issues: (i)

heterogeneity in terms of region, rural/urban areas, and (ii) to devise culturally appropriate means of education service delivery. Like health related interventions, education too can be delivered through a community driven approach, using the existing systems of local government and local institutions as systems of accountability. Among the instruments that may be considered to provide education to girls are transfers in cash and kind, conditional for instance on enrolling and then keeping girls in school, or in delaying marriage simultaneously with sending girls to secondary school. However, before this, the availability of appropriate schools will need to be shored up.



Chapter-4

Work and Employment



Work and Employment

With respect to the economic sphere of life, there is much potential for more equitable opportunities to be realized between our women and men; because our women are often invisible that does not mean they are always excluded. There is little in Afghan everyday life that does not, in some way, involve both its female and male members. There is certainly room for more work to be done here, but we are realistic, it will involve new approaches, new tools, new technologies as well as some new attitudes.⁹¹

The economy of Afghanistan has always been agriculture-based, and it is estimated that up to 80% of the population live in the rural areas. Contributing an estimated 53% to GDP and 67% to the labor force in 2003, agriculture (including crops, livestock, forestry and fishery) is central to the Afghan economy.⁹² Agricultural and related activities are a major vehicle for women's participation in the economy. Production is dominated mainly by subsistence-oriented family holdings, with a well-defined division of labor based on age and gender. Locations, cropping patterns, ethnic affiliation and economic and educational background also have implications for the specific division of labor within a given household, since communities differ regarding women's participation in agriculture. Horticulture generally involves women more than grain production, and poor households require greater involvement of women in income earning activities than do more wealthy households.

⁹¹ *National Development Framework*, p. 13

⁹² World Bank, 2004

This chapter discusses women's contribution to agriculture and livestock production and regional variation, as well as women's other income generating activities, along with the various social factors affecting them. It is demonstrated that women play an important role in all dimensions of agricultural production - in certain regions women's time input equals men's, while in other regions traditions restrict their work to the household where they are involved in crop processing and are in charge of household maintenance and reproductive activities. In most cases women's labor is non-monetized, but they make large labor contributions to a range of marketed products such as dried fruits, opium, fuel wood, dairy products and handicrafts. Women's involvement in the formal sector has grown since the 1960s, mainly as civil servants in the health and education sectors. Currently, close to one-third of all teachers are female, but many more are required to ensure increased enrollment of girls. In the health sector, an estimated 40% of health facilities lack female staff, which along with the shortage of rural health facilities constitutes a major constraint to delivering much needed health services to the female half of the population.⁹³

Unlike in the case of education and health, the gender and employment picture in Afghanistan is similar to that in other parts of the South Asia region - particularly Pakistan and northern India. Women's labor force participation rates in Afghanistan are comparable to the rest of the region at 35.8 % - lower than in Bangladesh (42.5%), Nepal (40.5%) and Sri Lanka (36.9%), but higher than in India (32.5%) and Pakistan (29.5%)⁹⁴. While gender-disaggregated data are not available by sector of employment, the likelihood is that this relatively high level of female labor force participation is due to the needs of an agrarian and pastoral economy. Second, poverty drives women's employment in Afghanistan, as it does in other South Asian countries, and high poverty rates are no doubt responsible for high female labor force participation.

⁹³ **Sources:** *The Nationwide Risk and Vulnerability Assessment (NRVA)* from 2003 provides data from 1850 villages in almost all the districts in the country, excluding few areas in the South, which could not be covered for security reasons. This data is the source for Maletta's *Women at Work: Gender, Wealth, Wages and Employment in Rural Afghanistan, 2002-2003*. This national level information is supplemented with numerous surveys and in-depth case studies of limited geographical coverage, such as AREU's *Case Studies Series*, DACAAR *Baseline Studies* (Laghman, Ghazni and Jaji), Afghanaid's studies in Badakhshan, studies of the poppy economy (Kandahar and Badakhshan) and Wily's case studies of land relations in Bamiyan. Urban vulnerability studies of more limited coverage plus small scale marketing surveys complement the picture

⁹⁴ World Bank SIMA

Agriculture and Women's Work.

In rural Afghanistan, as elsewhere in the region, there are distinct male and female roles in the rural economy. Evidence from surveys in Laghman, Ghazni, Badakhshan, Bamiyan, Paktia, Helmand, Faryab and Saripul confirms⁹⁵ that women and girls engage in a number of farm-based activities ranging from seed bed preparation, weeding, horticulture, and fruit cultivation to a series of post-harvest crop processing activities such as cleaning and drying vegetables, fruits and nuts for domestic use and for marketing. In a survey in Badakhshan,⁹⁶ it was observed that women carry out 37% of the household work, while men do only 15 %. Girls carry out 27% of domestic activities and boys do only 21%. Turning to the agricultural activities, women and men's contribution in terms of time allocation was found to be almost equal - but whereas women were found to be dominant within the domestic tasks, men were dominant as regards agriculture and livestock. There were considerable variations among the various districts, but in general women tend to play a greater role in agricultural and livestock production in Badakhshan than is the case in the southern and eastern parts of Afghanistan. Badakhshan is also known for comparatively more equitable gender relations than most other areas.

The study of Badakhshan also point towards the different nature of men's and women's agricultural activities, which presumably would apply to other regions as well. Male activities such as land preparation, planting/sowing, and fertilizer application are one-time jobs and usually accomplished within a specific, limited time. In comparison, female activities such as weeding are recurrent daily activities, lasting from the time that the seed is planted until it is harvested. In spite of spending the same amount of time on agricultural activities, women's work in general tends to be less visible and of lower value compared to men's. Often women's products are bartered rather than sold, and this is both a cause and a consequence of their perceived lower contribution to the rural economy. This attitude even extends to a number of products produced by women, which can only be exchanged in kind but not sold, since selling them would be considered shameful. Non-monetary exchange relations between households also contribute to social networking and cohesion, and are thus an important aspect of building social capital.

⁹⁵ *AREU Case Studies Series*: Alice Kerr-Wilson and Adam Pain, 2003; UNDCP Strategic Studies # 4 & #6; David Mansfield, 2001; Wilding, John and Azerbaijani-Moghadam, S., 2002; Strategic Monitoring Unit, 2001; Christoph Klinnert (ed.), 1997a; Christoph Klinnert (ed), 1997b; Azarbaijani-Moghaddam, S. (ed), n.d. (probably 1998); Jo Grace, 2004

⁹⁶ Afghanaid, 2001. The survey was conducted in Ishkashim, Warduj and Argu districts

A comparative study of three villages in Laghman illustrates women's work in another regional context, and although the overall picture is similar there are local variations in the degree of women's participation.⁹⁷ A combination of factors was found to affect women's participation in agricultural production, not only in these specific communities. Women in poor households, or households with a low worker/dependent ratio, tend to participate in more agricultural tasks outside the home. If the need is great enough, women may, in spite of the prevalent social norms, even engage in wage work on other peoples' land. This is not a new phenomenon but has been an option for poor households for many years.

Many smaller surveys and case studies have indicated that women contribute in a significant manner to the family income - but that variations between regions and income groups are so large that simple generalizations should be avoided. The *NRVA* survey now provides a far broader quantitative basis for analysis. According to Maletta (2003), 55.5% of the wealth groups⁹⁸ reported women having worked during the past year in some gainful activity (excluding housekeeping, and other 'non-economic' activities, including food for work or other relief activity), with the highest frequency in the North, Northeast and West. A closer look at the figures reveals that averages are not very informative in view of the huge variations - from about 80% or more of women in the North, Northeast and West down to less than 14% in the South.

Opportunity Structures and Cultural Norms: Implications for Women's Work

The role of women in agricultural production is largely determined by the life cycle of the household, the location of household fields and other reproductive and productive tasks that women undertake during the agricultural year. The availability of sufficient labor within the household can often mean that women are not required to participate in cultivation outside the family compound. However, widows, women with young children, or married daughters will often be required to assist with the cultivation of particular labor-intensive crops.⁹⁹ These observations are largely confirmed in the study *Gender Roles in Agriculture in five villages in Faryab and Saripul*, where Grace furthermore sums up, "It appears that the richer the

⁹⁷ Kerr-Wilson & Pain, 2003

⁹⁸ The *NRVA* covered 1850 villages in almost all the districts of the country. At every village *NRVA* collected data at three levels: the village, three main wealth groups and households. The total database comprises information on 1850 villages, about 5600 wealth groups and about 13,000 households (Maletta, 2003, p.3)

⁹⁹ Strategic Studies No. 6

household, the less the women work on land. Also, there appears to be a stigma attached to women working on land, as it denotes that the family is poor."¹⁰⁰ This observation can safely be assumed to have general validity all over Afghanistan.

With the *NRVA*, there are now large-scale comprehensive data available, which confirm the general picture emerging from the case studies of various regions. Across all regions and social groups, it is a cherished ideal that the men of the household should be the breadwinners, while women take care of domestic chores. However, most households cannot live up to this ideal, and women contribute in a variety of ways to the family's upkeep. But the ideal is reflected in the relative frequency of female gainful work among different wealth groups, with poor and very poor groups of women showing higher frequencies, 60% as compared to 46% among the better-off groups. The percentages are much higher in the North, Northeast and West than in other regions. Some specific occupations like domestic service are highly concentrated in the "very poor" group. Other activities, however, are more or less equally present in all the wealth groups.¹⁰¹

There is an inverse relationship between wealth and work, i.e. the frequency of work increases as wealth decreases. But some activities have a reverse pattern - they are practiced more frequently by those with a medium or higher level of wealth, such as embroidery and tailoring of clothes. There is thus a kind of stratification of various activities between the upper wealth group and the very poor. Embroidery is practiced three times more frequently among the richer than among the very poor, while domestic service is at the other extreme: for every 100 very poor groups reporting it, it is reported by only six better-off groups, i.e. 1 in 16.

The definition of 'economic activity'¹⁰² excludes the exchange of labor and products between households, which women in particular are engaged in. It also seems to exclude the post-harvest processing of crops (drying/cleaning/preserving), which is a predominately female domain - and it excludes the vital role women in the South play regarding a household's contracting of poppy harvesters, for whom three solid daily meals are part of their wage packet. Table12 amply reflects different regional practices regarding female

¹⁰⁰ Jo Grace, 2004

¹⁰¹ Maletta, 2003, p.10-12, Tables 10.2-10.9

¹⁰² 'Economic activity' follows the usage in employment statistics by referring to activities seeking or performing any work conducive to monetary income, or (as a special case) subsistence agriculture even if the product is not for sale (Maletta (2003), footnote 1, p. 9)

**Table 12: Women's Participation in Various Gainful Activities
in 2002-03 (in percent)**

	Any work	Harvest	Other farm work	Embroidery	Handi- craft	Weaving	Tailoring	Domestic service	Gather wood
TOTAL	55.5	6.2	11.9	9.3	13.0	17.8	20.8	11.7	9.1
North	90.2	2.3	20.3	19.3	24.4	42.1	27.9	30.1	21.8
North- East	80.9	13.0	21.1	20.4	13.8	19.2	28.5	18.8	6.8
West	79.9	4.1	8.1	6.8	5.8	46.5	21.6	12.0	4.5
West Central	45.0	6.1	6.9	3.0	1.3	17.7	13.9	8.7	2.6
Central	33.8	7.1	8.3	6.5	4.3	9.2	16.9	3.2	3.4
South	13.7	0.1	1.6	2.2	2.7	2.5	8.1	1.4	2.1
East	39.0	15.8	21.3	0.7	0.1	0.0	3.3	11.8	23.8
South-West	52.7	0.0	0.2	8.9	50.5	0.2	46.9	0.2	0.0

Only activities with a significant number of cases are mentioned. Planting and irrigating crops, shepherding, and gathering wild items other than wood were mentioned in only a handful of groups each

Source: Maletta, 2003

'economic' activities, with particularly the South representing a tradition where women's activities mainly take place within the four walls of the household. While the relative proportions between regions are probably realistic, the absolute figures thus underestimate women's 'gainful activities'.

Fruit Cultivation: The cropping pattern in a given locality has a considerable impact on women's participation in agricultural production, with grain production having the least female involvement and horticulture (vegetables, melons etc.), fruits and nuts in general including large labor input from girls and women. These are major cash crops, which counted for around half of all export earnings in the 1970s, when Afghanistan was the world's largest exporter of dried fruit.¹⁰³

¹⁰³ *Afghanistan: Survey of the Horticulture Sector*, FAO, 2003, p. 22

Box 6: Plum Cultivation in Ghazni

In Deh Hamza in Ghazni Province, certain kind of plum (*aloo bukhari*) is the main cash crop, and 94% of the farmers grow it. A total of 30% of the cultivated irrigated land is covered with plum orchards due to its high relative profitability. For those families with no land, all of the women and older girls work during the season to peel plums. It is the only activity reported for which women receive payment. Processing of plums is a painstaking task. All the women and girls are involved, working throughout the day from sunrise to sunset to carefully peel the plums, in addition to their other work in the household. Women complained of problems with their hands as a result of being covered in the acidic plum juice all day.¹⁰⁴

Opium: Currently opium is the biggest cash crop in Afghanistan, and women play an important role in the cultivation of opium poppy in both the northern and eastern regions of Afghanistan. They are involved at various stages of opium poppy cultivation including planting and weeding, thinning, lancing the capsules, collecting the opium, clearing the fields, breaking the capsules and removing the seeds, cleaning the seeds, and processing by-products such as oil and soap.¹⁰⁵ Women's role in cultivation is more visible and more valued in opium production than for example in wheat production - and both women and children get paid for their work in collection of opium resin in Badakhshan.¹⁰⁶ However, in the southern region which tends to be more conservative and where land ownership is more concentrated, women's participation in opium poppy cultivation is restricted to the task of preparing food and drink for itinerant opium poppy harvesters.¹⁰⁷ But in both the east and the south, poppy harvest is a labor-intensive time for women as well as men. Given the size of the hired workforce, the preparation of this food and drink is reported to increase women's workload significantly.¹⁰⁸

The low opportunity cost associated with women's labor tends to make labor-intensive crops, such as opium poppy, a more attractive option for the household¹⁰⁹ and poppy cultivation also involves widespread use of reciprocal labor. While it is often assumed that the burden of

¹⁰⁴ Klinnert, 1997a

¹⁰⁵ Strategic Studies #4 & 6

¹⁰⁶ Badakhshan Gender Survey and Programme Assessment in Terms of Gender Sensitivity. August 2001, Afghanaid

¹⁰⁷ Mansfield, 2002

¹⁰⁸ *ibid*

¹⁰⁹ Strategic Studies No, 6

reciprocal labor falls directly on the men, women and children are also actively involved in *ashar*.¹¹⁰ Many women find their workloads increased, by working on their own land, the land of their relatives, and preparing food for the *ashar* labor. Indeed, in the eastern region, women expressed a preference for the use of hired labor over that of *ashar* due to the fact that hired labor did not require food.¹¹¹ The public role of women in reciprocal labor arrangements for opium poppy cultivation highlights the importance of unpaid labor in the production of poppy.¹¹²

Supplementary incomes: The livelihood of most rural households consists of a mosaic of jobs, such as crop production, livestock, cutting of wood, labor and a number of other small-scale activities, and women frequently contribute with economic activities beyond agriculture. In mountainous villages,¹¹³ for example in Laghman, cutting and selling wood is an important seasonal activity for men and women alike, providing income for the household during the winter.

Similarly, pistachio trees growing on government land on the Northern plains were considered a public good which contributed much needed cash to rural households through the joint efforts of all household members. The district government administration controlled access to this good and at harvest time announced publicly when the various villages of the

Box 7: Wood Collection

In Village C, it is predominantly young and middle-aged women who walk the three hours to reach the dry wood, collect it and carry the 8-9 *seer* (56-63 kg) baskets of wood back to the village. Collecting wood is a strenuous and difficult task, which many men said they would rather avoid, preferring to find easier work in Pakistan. Older women tend not to go as they can send their daughters/daughters-in-law instead to collect wood. While women collect wood for firewood and chop it up in the forest, male collectors are likely to collect larger pieces of timber used to make windows and doors.¹¹⁴

¹¹⁰ *Ashar* refers to communal unpaid labor. It is an exchange system, where if one person works for another, the other is expected to reciprocate and work for the first person at a later stage. (Kerr-Wilson and Paine, 2003, p.21)

¹¹¹ Strategic Studies No. 5

¹¹² Mansfield 2002, p. 11

¹¹³ See for example Kerr-Wilson and Pain, 2003 and Klinnert 1997a, 1997b

¹¹⁴ Kerr-Wilson and Pain, 2003, p. 22-23

district were allowed to go and collect pistachios in a specified locality. All men and young boys would go for days to collect the pistachios, and on their return to the village, all of the women and children would work for days and nights de-shelling the pistachios, after which men would sell them to middlemen in the nearby bazaar.¹¹⁵ As a result of the conflict and the drought the pistachio forests are said to be depleted.

Livestock: Most rural households also keep livestock, mainly for domestic consumption of meat, milk, wool, eggs, etc., and occasionally for sale. The pastoral economy contributes significantly to the national economy. Women and children are the main tenders of animals. Boys are usually in charge of taking the animals for grazing while women and girls collect fodder. Hence, while women have a significant responsibility for animals, their livestock management in most areas is centered around the home, taking care of newborn and sick animals, milking, collecting fodder and stable feeding. In some of the northeastern mountainous areas in Panjshir and Badakhshan, the women play a far wider role in livestock management and may go to summer pastures without their families to tend animals and produce dairy products, even on contract for neighbors.¹¹⁶ Most rural households have some animals.¹¹⁷ The main production of livestock prior to the conflict and drought was by the pastoral nomads, with a gender and age division of labor broadly similar to the settled rural communities.¹¹⁸ Before the drought the pastoral economy contributed significantly to the

Box 8: Women and Livestock

The FAO/PIHAM project recognized the different roles and knowledge of women and men in livestock production and in particular the critical role which women play in diagnosing and tending to sick animals. The PIHAM project identified rural women as a key beneficiary group and recognized their capacities as animal production and health 'specialists', providing a basic veterinary worker training course for women. The reason was that women can often best provide the diagnosis for a sick animal through their intimate knowledge and observation on a daily basis.¹ The lesson learned from the PIHAM project was that women have an important role to play in participatory livestock management and monitoring and can influence their husbands (or other male household members) to change livestock practices.¹²⁰

¹¹⁵ Own observation from fieldwork in Samangan Province, 1977-79

¹¹⁶ Kandiyoti (2004, p. 12) describes this situation for Panjshir while Afghanistan report similarly from Badakhshan

¹¹⁷ Klinnert, 1997a, 1997b and Azerbaijani-Moghaddam, 1998

¹¹⁸ Ferdinand, 1969

national economy, with carpets/rugs, skins and wool being major export products. The carpets and rugs are primarily produced by women, who also play a major role in the preparation of the wool, as well as participating in the processing of the hides and skins and sheep casings.¹¹⁹

Social and Occupational Stratification

The socioeconomic status of the household determines the types of work that women do. At one end of the spectrum, the poorest women engage in manual agricultural labor or wage work outside the home (if available), while at the other end women from better-off families engage in sedentary, home-based activity.¹²¹ Overall, a recent survey reports that over 55% of women work in at least one economic activity, and the difference by wealth group for

Table 13: Women's Work by Wealth Group

Women working at least in one of the activities*				
	Total	Wealth group		
		Med/Better	Poor	Very poor
Total	55.5	46.3	59.8	60.6
North	90.2	79.6	96.1	95.0
Northeast	80.9	67.1	86.6	89.3
West	79.9	77.3	83.2	79.1
West Central	45.0	42.1	42.3	50.6
Central	33.8	22.7	38.5	39.9
South	13.7	9.8	15.6	15.6
East	39.0	16.5	49.1	51.4
Southwest	52.7	52.8	52.5	52.8

Source: Maletta, 2003

¹¹⁹ Exported for sausage making in Europe, Barfield, 2004, p.2

¹²⁰ Hill, 1997

¹²¹ Grace, 2004

women engaging in any activity is relatively small (46% for the richest and 61% for the poorest women).¹²²

Thus there is an inverse relationship between wealth and work, i.e. the frequency of the work increases as wealth decreases. But some activities have a reverse pattern - they are practiced more frequently by those with a medium or higher level of wealth. There is thus stratification among various activities, and the richest are three times more likely to practice embroidery

Table 14: Social Ranking of Female Gainful Activities in Rural Areas

Ratio of participation rates (better-off / very poor)								
	Embroidery	Tailoring	Weaving	Handicraft	Harvest	Other farm work	Gathering wood	Domestic service
Total	3.16	2.34	1.19	1.04	0.30	0.28	0.21	0.06
North	7.77	3.74	1.43	1.75		0.25	0.06	0.04
Northeast	4.35	6.13	0.73	0.54	0.46	0.29	0.50	0.02
West	1.68	6.47	1.15	0.99	0.12	0.58	0.06	0.03
West Central		5.07	2.79			0.13		
Central	0.95	0.85	0.70	0.92	0.32	0.24	0.46	0.25
South	0.83	0.94	0.85	0.57		0.14	0.28	0.25
East		2.97			0.32	0.27	0.35	0.24
Southwest	1.13	1.09		0.97				

Figures indicate the ratio between the medium/better-off group and the very poor group, regarding the percentage of groups reporting women working in each activity. A figure higher than 1 indicates that the activity is more frequent in the richer group; below 1 indicates the activity is more frequent among the very poor. The intermediate group ("poor") is ignored in this indicator. Figures are shown only when both extreme groups report the activity

Source: Maletta, 2003

¹²² Maletta, 2003

than the poorest, while the poorest are 16 times more likely than the richest to work in domestic service. Weaving and handicrafts are almost equally practiced across the socioeconomic divide and are among the 'desirable' activities for women (since a girl in any case is expected to do needlework for her trousseau), and which are socially acceptable to monetize, i.e. to produce for sale. Farm work, gathering wood and especially domestic service are practiced overwhelmingly by the very poor out of necessity - the first two because they go beyond women's accepted domestic chores and entail involvement in the male-dominated public sphere, and the third because it involves relations of servitude and inferiority and thus is socially degrading.

Gender Wage Gaps

Almost no economy pays equal wages to men and women, even for the same work, and Afghanistan is no exception. In agriculture, women receive a fraction of the wages that men do, ranging from 50% to 60% for specific tasks. The *NRVA* provides very useful information in this regard. These wage gaps are indicative of the value placed on women's work and on the social context of female poverty, e.g. in case of female-headed households.

The *NRVA* survey results show that the wage ratios (women/men) are 51% for planting, 61% for harvesting, and 50% for other farm work. In the case of non-farm occupations, the wage paid to women for making handicrafts is 41% of the male salary, and for weaving the ratio is 53% - men being paid US\$1.17 per day for weaving while women receive only \$0.62 per day. A woman gathering wood fetches 53% of the male pay - US\$0.81 per day as compared to her male

Table 15: Daily Wages for Men, Women and Children (US\$/day)

	Planting	Harvest	Other farm work	Handicrafts	Weaving	Gathering wood
Men	1.69	2.08	1.86	1.63	1.17	1.54
Women	0.86	1.26	0.93	0.66	0.62	0.81
Children (6-14 yrs)	1.22	1.05	0.90	0.84	0.81	0.72

Source: Maletta, 2003

Table 16: Non-Agricultural Wages for Women, 2003 (US\$/day)

	Dom. work	Handi craft	Weaving	Embroi- dery	Tailoring	GatheringOther		work
						Wood	Other	
Afghanistan	0.59	0.66	0.62	0.84	0.91	0.81	0.66	0.41
North	0.44	0.52	0.62	0.64	0.62	0.43	...	0.22
Northeast	0.68	0.86	0.82	0.92	1.13	1.53	...	...
West	0.38	0.40	0.47	0.28	0.59	...	0.76	...
West Central	0.32	...	0.40	...	0.71	...	...	...
Central	...	1.28	1.20	1.28	1.53	...	...	...
South	...	...	...	...	1.75	1.03	...	...
East	1.19	...	...	...	...	1.06	...	...
Southwest	...	0.58	0.42	0.59	0.63			

Source: Maletta, 2003

counterpart who is paid US\$1.54 per day. In the case of domestic work, women are even paid less than children - an average of US\$0.59 per day, while a child doing the same work earns US\$0.74. There is no obvious explanation for this gap - but may perhaps relate to fact that children are subject to fewer social restrictions on their mobility than women. A woman employed in domestic work for others earns 28% of a male construction worker's and 41% of a male shepherd's wage.

Property Rights and Control over Resources

High labor force participation rates do not automatically grant women control over resources nor access to property rights, as seen in many mountainous villages, for example in Laghman¹²³ Women's economic activities in the village can be divided into those which contribute to the household economy but where the income is controlled by the men (activities where women contribute basically their labor), and those activities which generate income and the income is controlled by the women themselves. The use of income, if any, from agricultural produce is in

¹²³ See for example Kerr-Wilson and Pain, 2003 and Klinnert 1997a, 1997b

most families controlled by men. Afghanaid's studies from Badakhshan mention that in spite of men and women's equal time spent on agriculture and livestock, the control of expenditures is the men's prerogative. The same applies to the income generated through the sale of wood which was the second most important source of income recorded from studies in mountain villages in Laghman. Likewise, livestock was also being owned either by the household (i.e. owned jointly between men and women) or by men. Only chickens were specifically reported as being owned exclusively and de facto by women.¹²⁴

Local custom regarding women's inheritance rights differs between ethnic groups and regions. In a study of land relations in Faryab province,¹²⁵ Wily notes that while cases of female inheritance were recorded particularly among Tajiks, no instances of widows inheriting land or houses were found among the Arab and Pashtun communities. Female land ownership is not common among Uzbeks, either. On the other hand, in Laghman female landowners are quite common, as reported from the study of three villages in Alingar.¹²⁶ About 50% of reported landowners were female, apparently acquiring land through inheritance. In reality, the women seemed to have little control over the land: The de jure position is that women do own land, while the de facto position is that they rarely exercise their right to land as they stand to lose too much if they do so, a situation which seems largely similar to communities in North Afghanistan.¹²⁷ Wily noted from Bamiyan¹²⁸ that "(W)omen's land ownership is not a live issue". In a survey of 15 villages only ten cases (2.5%) of women owning land were recorded. While not all of the female landowners were widows, a common trend seemed to be that sisters surrendered the land inherited from their father to a brother. One woman explained the rationale as follows:

"Girls must get land to meet the requirements of Islam, but they are not expected to keep it. If they keep it, they cannot expect their brothers to care for them if they face problems. My brother took my sister presents. He bought her a sheep and clothes. He praised her. At the same time he called us and the elders to witness in writing that she had passed the land over to him."

¹²⁴ Kerr-Wilson and Paine, 2003, p.14, Klinnert, 1997, 1997b

¹²⁵ Wily, 2004

¹²⁶ Kerr-Wilson and Pain, 2003

¹²⁷ Own observation from around Tashqurghan/Khulm area, in the 1970s

¹²⁸ Wily, 2004, p.70

Urban Employment

In urban areas women's employment outside the domestic sphere has always been limited and subject to severe restrictions. In 1975-76 approximately 5.6% of government employees were female, while in the industrial sector only 1,536 out of a total 36,875 employees were women. The fertilizer and electricity establishment in Mazar-i Sharif employed the largest number of women; in addition factories which processed foods and beverages or produced cotton cloth also had considerable numbers of female workers.¹²⁹ During the PDPA government, the female labor force in the cities increased and women were employed in all major government departments, in addition to the police force, the army, business and industry. Women taught, studied and acted as judges in the Family Court, dealing with issues relating to divorce, custody of children and other family matters. When the Taliban assumed power and initially prohibited all female employment, it was estimated that in Kabul city there were some 40,000 women in public service. They accounted for 70% of all the teachers in Kabul, about 50% of civil servants and an estimated 40% of medical doctors.¹³⁰

Professions such as medical doctors, teachers and any office bound work such as administration or engineering design were generally considered 'appropriate' for women in the urban context and could be seen as an extension of women's roles as mothers and care givers in the home.¹³¹ But the Taliban initiated wholesale dismissal of female government employees - resulting in international protest in 1996; a compromise was reached whereby women could draw their salaries without working. However, in 1999 the Report of the UN Secretary General on the situation of women and girls in Afghanistan noted reports of the widespread dismissal of female civil servants in a move to cut government spending. The Special Advisor on Gender Issues and Advancement noted that by mid-2000, there were a total of 5,874 Afghan women employed by the international assistance community in Afghanistan (including 1,020 doctors and health workers, 2,066 traditional birth attendants, and 900 WFP bakery staff in Mazar-i Sharif and Jalalabad).¹³² There are only limited data available on the post-Taliban representation of women in the civil service. According to 2003 data from the Central Statistics Office, 21% of all permanent government employees were

¹²⁹ Hunte, 1978, p.34-38

¹³⁰ E/CN.4/1997/59.Final Report on the situation of human rights in Afghanistan submitted by Mr. Choong-Hyun Paik, Special Rapporteur, in accordance with Commission of Human Rights resolution 1996/75, para 71 and para 77

¹³¹ Azarbaijani-Moghadam, 2002, p. 11

¹³² Barakat & Wardell, 2001, p.17-24

women.¹³³ The available evidence on educational qualifications suggests that these women are significantly less educated than male civil servants.¹³⁴

Current labor market opportunities for women are very limited in urban areas, and this contributes significantly to urban poverty. Typical employment for unskilled women is domestic work. In the female-headed households surveyed, 52% of women had been working infrequently in Kabul and elsewhere, sewing, embroidering or washing clothes for others. In the 48% of female-headed households where women were not working themselves, their young sons (under 15) were working sporadically as daily wage labor for minimal returns. In 27% of the male-headed households, women were working as well as men.¹³⁵

Women's access to the urban labor market is constrained by historical circumstances, low skills, limited opportunities, stringent cultural norms, occupational sex segregation and a number of demographic factors of which availability of childcare is an important part. According to an IRC survey, up to 40% of interviewed women referred to lack of child care as a constraint to their participation in the labor market. Kindergardens were first introduced in 1980 as part of the Soviet-inspired Early Childhood Development Program, where facilities attached to schools, government offices or factories provided nursery care, preschool, and kindergarden for children (3 months to 7 years). By 1990 there were more than 270 preschools and 2,300 teachers caring for over 21,000 children, mainly in Kabul.¹³⁶ Like other institutions, the Kindergardens closed down during the turmoil of the 1990s following the withdrawal of women from the labor market. In response to complaints from women in government service, Kindergardens have been reintroduced in a number of ministries. In response to complaints from women in government service, Kindergartens have been reintroduced in a number of ministries during the past several years.

In addition to some opportunities in wage employment, women in the urban economy tend to be employed in the informal sector. A recent market survey of micro-entrepreneurs¹³⁷ in

¹³³ E/CN.6/2005/5. The situation of women and girls in Afghanistan. Report of the Secretary-General, 2004

¹³⁴ World Bank, 2004

¹³⁵ Grace, 2003, p. 12-13, 31

¹³⁶ Asian Development Bank, 2003. USAID Assistance to Afghanistan, June 2004, wwwc.house.gov/international_relations/108/

¹³⁷ Horus Banque et Finance, 2002

Mazar-i Sharif, Pul-i Khumri, Bamiyan, Herat and Kandahar showed that women are more present in services (beauty parlor, tailoring etc.) and production (carpet weaving mainly) than men. Few women work as middlemen or traders, since that would require that they be in contract with strangers. On average, the women entrepreneurs surveyed employ 4.8 employees while male entrepreneurs employ 2.3 persons, since female dominated activities such as tailoring and carpet weaving tend to be more labor-intensive. Most employees are family members. Women's activities are small-scale compared to men's, with an investment and working capital 15%-20% of that of men and monthly turnover around 25% of men's. Instability and insecurity were rated by both men and women as obstacles to growth, but women mentioned lack of skills and lack of demand more frequently than men did, as well as 'no good suppliers'. Among both men and women lack of funds was the highest rated obstacle.

A study of businesswomen in Kabul¹³⁸ concluded that while women are active in the urban economy, among the women surveyed there was relatively low vocational capacity in areas outside of handicrafts and other 'traditional' sectors. This was underlined by the fact that interviewees with no education constituted the majority of participants at 54%, while 11% had attended primary school, 6% secondary school, 16% high school, and 13% had an advanced education. These Kabul businesswomen thus have a comparatively better educational background than the average woman. The constraints raised by these business women were (a) access to market, (b) difficulty in meeting shopkeepers and making arrangements to buy and sell, and (c) reliance on male relatives to manage the non-production aspects of their businesses.

Location of work for the female entrepreneurs who participated in a credit survey was overwhelmingly (99%) in the home, and as an extension of this, women tended not to view their enterprises as formal businesses. Nearly half of the women entrepreneurs indicated that they control their income, and 40% of women would be able to take a loan without permission from a male relative. Interestingly, in the focus groups the women who were most actively engaged in the public portions of their businesses (input acquisition, market assessment, negotiation with retailers) were those with well-educated husbands (12th class or higher). Women who cited their largest business constraints as their families' prohibition against their going to the market and engaging in the public portions of business also reported that their male relatives were uneducated, or had only one or two years of education.

¹³⁸ Matney: 2002. A total of 87 female entrepreneurs were interviewed

Female Headed Households and Vulnerability

In the 1970s, before the conflict, in spite of the high rate of widowhood for women (13.2% as compared to 4.5% for men), female headed households were very rare - 1.1% in urban and 1.2% in rural areas.¹³⁹ By contrast, in 1996 it was estimated that there were some 45,000 war widows in Kabul, each supporting an average of six dependants.¹⁴⁰ Current estimates of the prevalence of female headed households (FHH) in Afghanistan range from around 16% in Kabul (Caritas)¹⁴¹ to between 4% and 20% in three districts in Badakhshan (Afghanaid).¹⁴² The current high frequency of female-headed households reflects how the prevailing poverty and years of conflict have undermined social networks and traditional mechanisms of mutual social support.

The *NRVA* documents that female-headed households are poorer than average. The proportion of female-headed households in the two poorest quintiles (9.3%) is more than double the level in the highest quintile (3.9%). Per capita expenditures in households headed by a female are 14 percentage points lower than those in households headed by a male. The *NRVA* data also reveal that a higher than average proportion of landless are female headed (15%, nearly double the ratio for the sample as a whole), which may reflect the loss of formal asset entitlements by women to male relatives after the loss of a husband. This phenomenon

Box 9: Widowhood and Destitution: Consequences of Conflict and War

In a study on land relations in Faryab, Wily (2004) has focused on the plight of widows, which are estimated to number up to 30 000 in Faryab province alone. While village elders and arbabs claimed to do their best for the widows, widows spoke bitterly of their lack of property and of discrimination against them. Loss of the earning male household head typically plunges poorer widows into destitution, as support may have been provided through their husband's employment as a farm worker. Remarriage is often their best chance of securing shelter and food for themselves and their children. On the other hand, urban widows seemed to find it somewhat easier to cope, and of the 27 widows interviewed by Wily in Maimana (mainly war widows), around half worked as domestics while others worked in bakeries or did embroidery piecework from shops.

¹³⁹ Hunte, 1978, p. 11

¹⁴⁰ E/CN.4/1997/59.Final Report on the situation of human rights in Afghanistan submitted by Mr. Choong-Hyun Paik, Special Rapporteur, in accordance with Commission of Human Rights resolution 1996/75, para 71

¹⁴¹ Caritas International, 2003

¹⁴² Afghanaid, 2001

highlights a key aspect of the gender dimension of Afghanistan's development challenge and most probably reflects that female-headed households in many cases have lost or do not have a very important human asset (working-age male) and the restrictions against women working outside the household in many rural areas, as well as women's lower human capital (particularly education). In view of the destitution experienced by most widows, the need to expand women's income-generating opportunities is urgent.

Policy Implications

The striking feature of Afghanistan's economic structure is the dominance of the informal sector. Although it is inherently difficult to estimate the size of the informal economy, it is clear that some 80-90% of economic activity in Afghanistan occurs in the informal sector, which has been largely responsible for the recent economic recovery and dynamism. Exchange services between households are widespread, and women perform a major part of this non-monetized work.¹⁴³

However, the traditional role of women in Afghanistan is a constraint to their more equitable participation in economic activities, which is especially hard on the large number of female-headed households, for whom eking out an existence without a male breadwinner is very difficult. In particular, female wage labor is still viewed as a solution of last resort for households in desperate straits, and their wage rates are normally only half the level of men's or less. Women have few marketable skills and generally poor education, with an estimated female literacy rate of 21%. But other constraints should not be underestimated. With high fertility and infant and maternal mortality rates, reproduction and related health issues occupy much of women's time. The absence of many services and the need to produce agricultural products for subsistence also imposes an opportunity cost for women who want to join the labor market. Women often lack ownership, control, and access to productive assets such as land, equipment, and materials, and their legal right to inheritance is usually bypassed. The lack of working capital (and shortage of credit) reduces opportunities to start activities that require an initial investment.

Agriculture and related activities will also in the future be a major vehicle for women's participation in the economy. As part of a demand-driven and community-based approach, women should be explicitly targeted which will reap major benefits in terms of agricultural production and incomes.

¹⁴³ World Bank, 2004

Within the informal sector women's participation and income-earning possibilities should be increased, while increased female employment in the public sector should be ensured:

- ✓ strengthen women's involvement in agricultural and livestock production in the form of extension and training, credit facilities and expanding marketing opportunities. Applied research and focused policies that target women as producers in agricultural and livestock production
- ✓ development of socially acceptable skilled and unskilled employment opportunities for women in the urban sector in response to the high level of poor female-headed households
- ✓ formation of cooperation among groups of women involved in informal activities and support in the form of guidance on market acceptability, product handling techniques, marketing methods, and calculation of marketing costs
- ✓ secure women's inheritance and property rights, to promote their potential as producers and to address important aspects of rural vulnerability
- ✓ accelerate implementation of micro-credit schemes (MISFA), with particular focus on women. Integrate skills enhancement training and vocational training with provision of micro-credit, supported by market surveys and training in account keeping
- ✓ improve targeting of poverty-alleviation programs to provide minimal safety net to the most vulnerable groups such as female-headed households
- ✓ technological skills upgrading in the traditional handicrafts sectors to increase its income earning and export potential
- ✓ support to businesswomen through access to credit, raw materials, training and markets
- ✓ substantial strengthening of women's employment in the health and education sectors, which will have direct positive effects on girls' school enrollment, women's access to health services, maternal mortality and general child and family health
- ✓ collection of adequate sex-disaggregated data across all sectors to document women's and men's involvement and to enable monitoring of future developments and effects of investments



Chapter-5

Legal Rights and Voice



Legal Rights and Voice

The Constitution of Afghanistan, passed by the Constitutional Loya Jirga in 2003, proclaims that 'any kind of discrimination and privilege among the citizens of Afghanistan is prohibited (Article 22), and the citizens of Afghanistan have equal rights and duties before the law (Article 23). This is by default taken to indicate constitutionally guaranteed equality of men and women. Article 45 furthermore provides that 'the state shall adopt necessary measures to ensure physical and psychological well being of family, especially of child and mother, upbringing of children and the elimination of traditions contrary to the provisions of sacred religion of Islam.¹⁴⁴ The Bonn Agreement was slightly more specific in terms of calling for the creation of a gender-sensitive and fully representative government and underlining the importance of women's participation in the Interim Administration.

Despite Constitutional gender equality, Afghan women's lives are still influenced more by the notion of complementarities between male and female roles rather than equality. Afghan women are far from a homogenous group, and differences by ethnicity, region, socioeconomic status, education level and residence in urban/rural areas are significant. Overall women's lives center on the family and the household, which are seen as their main area of activity. Their rights and duties are assigned by both formal and informal systems, which ultimately define their place in the family and in the society. This chapter discusses the formation of gender relations in the household along with women's limited role in decision-making and control over household

¹⁴⁴ *The Constitution of Afghanistan*, Year 1382 (2003)

assets and planning of family affairs. The subordinate position of females within the domestic sphere is aggravated by their very weak legal position, particularly in relation to Family Law and the informal justice system, as well as the fact that women's access to either of these systems is very limited. Finally, the chapter explores women's ability to act and express themselves, to exercise control over their own lives and to participate in decision-making at local and national levels, not least in connection with the new elected Community Development Councils (CDCs) and the upcoming Parliamentary and provincial and district council elections.¹⁴⁵

Family and Household

Gender relations in Afghanistan are largely defined by the values on which the patrilineal and patriarchal family is based. The extended family and lineage (*qaum*)¹⁴⁶ play a central role in the social order, and in the establishment of social identities. Hence the patrilineal family is the main focal point for the individual man or woman, and a key factor in social relations and critical building block in the social structure. The importance of the patrilineal family and *qaum* extends right from decisions about what marriage alliances to forge with other families or lineages to decisions regarding political loyalties at national level. Whole kinship groups (rather than individuals) constituted the backbone of the Communist movement in the 1960s-70s,¹⁴⁷ just as entire tribal segments pledged their allegiance to the Taliban in the 1990s.

Twenty years of conflict have taken their toll on the social cohesion of Afghan society, but the close networks of family and kinship groupings have survived and provide individuals with social security. The fact that much of this 'social capital' of the Afghans has withstood war, exile and drought has been identified (for example, in the *NRVA*) as one of the key factors in their elaborate coping strategies, which explains why they are not far worse off today.¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁵ **Sources:** The Feinstein International Famine Center, Tufts University, in its *Human Security and Livelihoods of Rural Afghans, 2002-2003*, used the *NRVA* (*Nationwide Risk and Vulnerability Assessment*) survey data and added this with primary research of its own in Badghis, Balkh, Herat, Kabul, Kandahar, and Nangarhar. This data provides information on women's role in decision-making in five provinces. All other data are derived from surveys and studies of more limited geographical coverage, such as AREU's Report on NSP (2004) based upon case studies in six districts, reports by the Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch and anthropological and legal studies.

¹⁴⁶ *Qaum* is a relative and situational concept, which is used to refer to a person's "in-group", be it an ethnic group, a lineage, sub-lineage, local community or even religious sect. Hence, when referring to *qaum*, a person refers to his/her primary cultural identity and affiliation (Olesen 1994)

¹⁴⁷ For a discussion of the PDPA, its strategy and the local responses to the Saur Revolution in 1978, see Olesen, 1983

¹⁴⁸ World Bank, 2004 d

In this social order, which is mainly organized around male blood-relations, women and their offspring are seen as part of the property and patrimony of the husband's extended family.¹⁴⁹ Men's lives are also organized around their duties and obligations to the larger family, dominated by the absolute authority of the male head of family. However, the mobility, choice and opportunities of male family members by far exceed that of any female, who are collectively subject to male authority and protection - irrespective of age, as younger brothers may both chaperone and issue orders to much older sisters.

The husband and extended family control the lives of women through control of property, marriage relations and children. Most girls are married off early and may even have been 'promised' to somebody's son at the time of their birth. It is customary to marry within the *qaum*, and marriage among cousins is common. While this may be detrimental for genetic reasons, it is considered preferential compared to handing over the family's women to 'strangers' - and may in most cases also guarantee the bride better treatment by her in-laws, as they are her own close relatives. The children born in the marriage are thus counted as belonging to the father's lineage and *qaum*. The women of the family embody the collective honor of the family, lineage, and sub-lineage, and hence it becomes essential to ensure the chastity of the women and control their behavior and relations (and not least their sexuality) in relation to the outside world. This is the normative framework of *purdah*, which entails the seclusion and veiling of women and in line with which gender relations are being governed by the concept of *mahram*, whereby women and men ideally are permitted to interact only with those of the opposite sex with whom they are closely related by blood or marriage, i.e. wife-husband, parent-children, siblings, and those relatives with whom marriage is forbidden. As a consequence, women's role outside the household gets quite restricted, as it is coined in one of the more extreme local proverbs: "*For the woman, only the house or the grave.*"

Marriages are contracted between families rather than individuals and in most cases involve the payment of bride wealth by the groom's family to the father of the bride. The bride wealth represents 'compensation' for the transfer of rights and responsibilities toward the woman from her family of birth to the groom's family. There are no recent surveys of the amount of bride wealth or bride-price, but in the 1970s, depending on factors such as the ethnicity, rural-urban location, socio-economic and educational status, bride-wealth could amount to

¹⁴⁹ Boesen, 2004

several years' of earnings of the prospective groom.¹⁵⁰ Today, the bride-price reportedly ranges from US\$ 500 to US\$ 2,500 (while the annual per capita income is estimated at 212\$).¹⁵¹

Most newly married couples reside with the groom's family, and the young bride comes under the command of her mother-in-law. She only gradually gains prestige in her new family in accordance with the number of preferably male children she bears. Elderly matriarchs with many sons can thus by force of their personality and support of their sons gain influence within the extended family and local community - most women probably exert far greater influence over their sons than over their husband, not least in view of the often considerable age difference between husband and wife. The veneration of motherhood and mothers is coined in many local sayings such as "*Paradise is at the foot of the mother.*"

One of the most important concepts regarding the upbringing and socialization of children is *tarbia*, which refers to children's manners and the quality of their relationships with others. The four most important parts of *tarbia* are: good and clean language, respect for elders and parents, bodily cleanness, and hospitality. However, *tarbia* does not just refer to children's actions and attitudes - it is a moral quality. Children with good *tarbia* behave or appear well because they know the differences between right and wrong. This knowledge of morality is rooted in religion, so *tarbia* is developed based on religious teaching. While both boys and girls have to learn the basic qualities of *tarbia*, girls are supposed to display qualities such as modesty, while courage is a quality which is promoted among boys.¹⁵² Gender plays a major role in determining the socialization of children: To be a boy or a man is to know about the world and its problems and take on responsibility within it. In contrast, for girls, the time they spend outside the home generally decreases as they get older, and the social pressure on girls to conduct themselves appropriately and to stay within the home grows. Even other children contribute to control and comment on girls' behavior, e.g. boys are being brought up with the responsibility to protect and be responsible for their sisters and their behavior. Since the women are the embodiment of the family's honor, it is little surprise that girls' behavior constitutes a source of conflict in the family far more than boys' behavior. Girls, already brought up to be modest, reportedly further control and curtail their behavior in order to

¹⁵⁰ See Olesen, 1982 and Christensen, 1982

¹⁵¹ UNICEF, 2001a

¹⁵² De Berry, J. and Fazili, A. et al., 2003

avoid family arguments and reprisals. As a girl grows up, the moral standards she has to adhere to get more closely linked with sexuality, and restrictions on mobility, expressions, and social interactions increase accordingly. The guidelines for social interaction for women are based on *mahram* in the sense that contacts with the opposite sex should preferably fall within the *mahram* category, which also constitute the men who can act as protectors of the girl/woman and her reputation. The Taliban took this notion so far that no woman was allowed in public space without the escort of a *mahram*.

Concerns over a girl's chastity are an important impetus for marrying her off at a young age, in order to minimize the risk of pre-marital sex, since virginity before marriage is an absolute requirement. The inability to 'prove' virginity on the wedding night may have serious consequences and may lead to the groom's rejection of the bride.¹⁵³ In order to avoid such a shame befalling the family, parents take all kinds of precautionary measures, such as restricting the girl's mobility to the household, withdrawing her from school upon puberty in order to shield her from the gaze of unrelated males, and so forth. With marriage constituting the only 'career', most girls miss out on their chance to get an education, and early marriage may deprive them of their adolescence. But among conservative sections of the Afghan population, like in many other traditional societies, the idea of an adolescent period between puberty and adulthood is alien. A girl who menstruates can bear children, and is therefore 'a woman'.¹⁵⁴

Children are brought up to feel responsibility for their families and take up a number of duties even from a young age. The different norms for boys and girls are also reflected in the type of demands the family makes on their labor: While 11% of boys in the age group of 7-13 years work at least half a day (defined as 4-12 hours work) "for an income/out of the household", this only is the case for 5% of the girls in this age group. Girls on the other hand have to shoulder far greater responsibilities inside the household, where 23% work at least for half a day, while this is the case for only 11% of the boys of the same age group (7-13 years). Altogether, a higher number of girls have to shoulder a workload inside and outside the house than boys - 28% of girls versus 22% of boys.¹⁵⁵

¹⁵³ E.g. see Olesen, 1982

¹⁵⁴ UNICEF, 2001

¹⁵⁵ UNICEF/Central Statistics Office, 2003

The tradition of paying bride wealth or bride price typically leads to a considerable age difference between bride and groom, since the latter first have to accumulate the required amount of money before getting married. The age difference between spouses also results in a high rate of widowhood. In the 1970s, the rate of widowhood for females was reportedly three times as high as for males: 13.2% of women of 15 years of age and over were widowed compared to 4.5% of men in the same age group.¹⁵⁶ (This is despite the much higher mortality rate for women during their child-bearing years than for men in the same age group - see Chapter 2.) Another reason for the much greater rate of widowhood among women is that remarriage for men is much more common than for women. These broad patterns can be expected to be similar today.

The years of conflict and exile have introduced new perspectives and challenges into the firmly structured and male-dominated Afghan family. Exile and the exposure to other norms and opportunities in terms of education and employment for women have made many families more open toward the idea of letting the female members out in society. Absolute poverty and destitution have forced others to do the same - while the rich can afford honor, the poor must 'eat shame' (see Box 10).

Despite gradually changing norms, Afghan women still have very limited influence over major decision-making within the family according to the NRVA and Tufts University surveys. In the provinces of Badghis, Balkh, Herat, Kabul and Nangarhar, male and female respondents were

Box 10: Poppy Cultivation

A recent report on poppy cultivation gives the account of a poor sharecropper who was imprisoned for defaulting on his loans (as a result of his poppy crop having been eradicated). It was reported that the sharecropper's mother and the current landlord appealed to the district administrator for his release, insisting that the women of the family would help him in the field so that they could repay his debts. The sharecropper was released but was ashamed. He stated that 'no wife or mother work on the land in this district but mine are working with me. My nine-year old daughter and my younger children are also working with me. They cannot go to school as they help me on the land - this is the curse of debt'.¹⁵⁷

¹⁵⁶ Spittler, J.A. and Frank, N., 1977 quoted from Hunte, 1977

¹⁵⁷ Drugs and International Crime Department of the Foreign & Commonwealth Office, 2004

Table 17: Women have NO Role in Decision-making regarding the Following

Province income	Use of household productive assets	Sale of household non-product assets	Sale on household and children's marriage	Family Planning
Badghis	>50% of villages in all districts	>50% of villages in all districts	>50% of villages in all districts	>50% of villages in all districts
Balkh	>26% of villages in 56% districts	>50% of villages in 54% districts	>50% of villages in 62% of districts	>50% of villages in 39% of districts
Herat	>26% of villages in 50% of districts	>50% of villages in 93% of districts	>50% of villages in 93% districts	>50% of villages in 71% of districts
Kabul	>26% of villages in 71% of districts	>50% of villages in 50% of districts	>50% of villages in 29% of districts	>26% of villages in 57% of districts
Nangarhar	>50% of villages in 74% of districts	>50% of villages in 89% of districts	>50% of villages in 89% of districts	>50% of villages in 95% of districts

Source: Human Security and Livelihoods of Rural Afghans, 2004, Feinstein International Famine Center, Tufts University

asked about women's role in deciding on use of household income, sale of productive and non-productive assets, as well as deciding on the number of children and the marriage of children. Overall, women's decision-making power is limited, but women in Balkh and Kabul provinces exert markedly more influence than in Badghis and Nangarhar provinces.¹⁵⁸

As women get older and their sons grow up, they gain greater influence in the family and household. For widows, however, the situation is different. While they may be plunged into destitution by their husband's death and thus lose all influence in the family, they may gain more influence over their own lives. This aspect was explained to Wily during her study of widows in Maimana city:¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁸ Feinstein International Famine Center, 2004. In Badghis, the study covered 12 villages in three districts, in Balkh in districts, in Herat 16 villages in 4 districts, in Kabul 16 villages in three districts, in Kandahar 16 villages in three districts, in Nangarhar 16 villages in 5 districts. The team conducted app. 350 interviews with women and men

¹⁵⁹ Wily, L. Alden, 2004

"When you are a widow you see how you were oppressed. Husbands control even the money that you earn from embroidery. I get more today from embroidery than I got from my husband.". And in the words of another widow: "Because we are so poor we are allowed to work and to move about the town. When we were married with husbands we could not do that. It is accepted that widows do things that wives can not be entrusted to do".

Legal Position

While Afghan women have enjoyed Constitutional gender equality before the law since 1964, the legal system granted differential rights to men and women. The 1977 Civil Code introduced significant reforms in terms of allowing women to choose a husband without the prior consent of their guardian, allowing women to stipulate a right to divorce should her husband take a second wife, regulating polygamy and rendering divorce pronouncement by an intoxicated husband invalid.¹⁶⁰ During the years of conflict and break-down of state functions, the 1977 Civil Law was no longer enforced and a largely unreformed Hanafi¹⁶¹ family law and customary law held practical validity in the sphere of family law.

The legal framework guiding Afghan women's lives thus consists of a mixture of civil law, customary law, Islamic Law (Hanafi and Shia) and traditions, all of which stress the complementarities of male and female roles more than their equality. The 2003 Constitution states with regard to the functioning of the Judiciary that 'whenever no provision exists in the constitution or the laws for a case under consideration, the court shall follow the provisions of the Hanafi jurisprudence within the provisions set forth in this Constitution.' (article 130), the exception being cases dealing with personal matters belonging to followers of the Shia sect, where the court shall apply Shia jurisprudence (article 131). It is not clear which laws are considered valid, but presumably this includes the laws passed during the democratic decade 1963-73, as the 1964 Constitution was the frame of reference for the Bonn Agreement.¹⁶² This implies that women's rights are formally regulated by laws such as the Law on Marriage

¹⁶⁰ Lau, 2002

¹⁶¹ The Hanafi school is the first of the four orthodox Sunni schools of law, and is followed by the Sunni majority in Afghanistan. The Hanafi school of law was founded by Nu'man Abu Hanifah (d. 767) in Kufa in Iraq. The Hanafi school bases its interpretation of Islamic Law on the Qur'an, the Traditions of the Prophets, *ijma* (universal concurrence of the community of believers), and *qiyas* (analogical reasoning). In addition to these, local customs are accepted as a secondary source of law in the Hanafi school of law. (philter.ucsm.ac.uk/encyclopaedia/islam/sunni/hana.html)

¹⁶² Amnesty International, 2003a

of 1971/1350 and the Criminal Procedure Law of 1965/1344, which will form the basis for new draft laws to be prepared by the Judicial Reform Commission.

With women's chastity, modesty and overall behavior seen as a reflection of the family honor, most domestic problems and cases involving any perceived transgressions of women tend to be handled inside the family. Restrictions on women's mobility and the expectations that they be accompanied by a male relative when outside their home limit their ability to access courts on their own. Furthermore, according to Shari'a, the testimony of a woman in court is worth half of that of a man, and female defendants thus may face difficulties in proving their innocence. Domestic abuse can be raised as the basis for divorce, but there are no legal codes that criminalize domestic abuse or violence within the home, and the courts routinely send back women to abusive spouses telling them to "come to an agreement."¹⁶³

Afghanistan has signed a number of international conventions related to gender, including the Convention on the Political Rights of Women, the Convention Concerning the Equal Remuneration for Men and Women Workers for Work of Equal Value, and the Convention Concerning Discrimination in respect of Employment and Occupation.¹⁶⁴ These international standards have apparently not affected domestic law. On 5 March 2003, Afghanistan ratified the United Nations' Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women, (signed in 1980),¹⁶⁵ which like the other international conventions ratified will require legislative and administrative measures, to give legal backing to the nation's commitment to advancement of its women. Until that happens, a large degree of confusion over the exact rights of women and their legal status will continue to exist.¹⁶⁶ Widespread violations of the most basic rights of women and girls, including physical abuse, underage marriage, exchange of girls to settle feuds, have been reported, i.a. by Amnesty International during recent visits.¹⁶⁷

¹⁶³ Feinstein International Famine Center, 2004 p. 102; Amnesty International, 2003: 39

¹⁶⁴ Amnesty International, 2003: 18

¹⁶⁵ Afghanistan has also ratified the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and the International Covenant of Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESR), in January 1983. Afghanistan signed the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) in August 1980, and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) in September 1990, and ratified it in March 1984. (Human Rights Watch, 2001, note 32)

¹⁶⁶ Lau, 2002

¹⁶⁷ Amnesty International, 2004; 2003; 2003a; Human Rights Watch, 2001

The Judiciary

The personnel of the Afghan judiciary have a wide range of educational and training backgrounds. Most are graduates from religious schools, with a small number from the Shari'a School or the Law School at Kabul University. Indeed, according to the study by the Tufts University team, many lack training in both Islamic and statutory law. The Law School and Shari'a School differ significantly in the training they provide.¹⁶⁸ Traditionally the Shari'a graduates represent the conservative camp in Afghan law while the Law School represents the more progressive camp, which was behind the formulation of the 1964 Constitution and the law reforms in the 1960s and 1970s. Currently, however, the graduates from Shari'a Schools form a majority in the judicial leadership, which presumably affects the judicial reform process.¹⁶⁹

The Judiciary has been an exclusively male domain, which is still largely the case. Of a total of 2,006 sitting judges, only around 27 are female. With the exception of the heads of the juvenile and family courts in Kabul, women are not found in key positions within the judiciary. Where women do serve as judges, reports indicate that they do not perform the same functions as their male counterparts. Female judges tend to act in the capacity of judicial clerks and are rarely involved in the adjudication of cases. In general, there seems to be considerable resistance in the judiciary against greater inclusion of women in the judiciary. However, approximately 25% of law students at the Universities of Balkh and Kabul are women,¹⁷⁰ so the potential for achieving a better gender balance exists. Afghan women who do approach the courts do so mainly for divorce, child custody, inheritance or other matters that are commonly categorized as family law. This area of law is reportedly¹⁷¹ in urgent need of reform, not least because of the absence of functioning family courts. These were established under the Najibullah administration (1986-92) and retained by the Rabbani government (1992-96), but dismantled under the Taliban.

Marriage and Divorce

The Law on Marriage stipulates that marriage must be through choice and that 16 years is the legal age of marriage for women and 18 years for men. However, there is no clear

¹⁶⁸ For a discussion of the development of the religious schools, see Olesen, 1995

¹⁶⁹ Feinstein International Famine Center, 2004, p. 204-211

¹⁷⁰ Amnesty International, 2003

¹⁷¹ According to the Afghan female lawyers interviewed by the International Crisis Group, 2003

provision in the Criminal Procedure Law to penalize those who arrange forced or underage marriages. Article 99 of the Law on Marriage states that marriage of a minor may be conducted by a guardian, known under Shari'a law as a *Shari'a-wali*, i.e. the legal minimum age for marriage can, and is safely ignored. There is currently a failure to treat forced marriage as a criminal offence due to the attitudes of judicial personnel and of the wider society. The Ministry of Women's Affairs is currently advocating for an increase of the legal age of marriage for women to 18 years, as well as a reenactment of the requirement to register marriages also at provincial level.

Comprehensive data on actual marriage age is lacking, as provisions to register marriage and birth are absent in most areas, and many people do not know their exact age. Age of marriage in practice varies between urban and rural areas, and according to ethnic background and economic circumstances. It is customary to marry off girls at a young age¹⁷² in rural areas, and there is evidence that the recent years of abject poverty due to armed conflict and drought has resulted in reducing the marriage age for girls even further, down to the pre-puberty level in some cases. This has partly been a measure to reduce the number of dependents to be fed within the household and partly a way of raising cash for household survival through receipt of bride price.¹⁷³ Child brides are often given to substantially older men, as the second or third wife.¹⁷⁴ Medica Mondiale's work in Kabul's Women Prison during September-December 2003 revealed that of the 32 inmates, 60% were married when they were under the age of 16, and the data suggested a connection between child marriage and family abuse and violence.¹⁷⁵

Marrying a child and being directly paid for the sale are prohibited under both the civil code and Islamic law, although the definition of 'child' differs. Marzia Basel, a former Afghan judge and founder of the Afghan Women Judges Association in Kabul, pointed out that "there are

¹⁷² "A girl should have her first period in her husband's house and not her father's house" is a local saying reflecting this position

¹⁷³ Atmar, Barakat and Strand, 1998. A report written in 2002 for the WFP by Catherine Dunnion of the relief group GOAL Ireland, reported widespread selling of daughters in the far northern province of Jawzjan. She found villages where numerous girls aged 8 to 12 were sold, usually for the equivalent of \$300 to \$800. "Everyone I talked to insisted that this activity has only been happening over the past four years of the drought," Dunnion wrote, adding that in villages that received WFP food, the number of girls sold declined (ibid)

¹⁷⁴ Feinstein International Famine Center, 2004, p. 109

¹⁷⁵ Bahgam & Mukhatari, 2004

Box 11: Child Marriage and Poverty

Recent data from UNICEF indicate shows that approximately 16% of Afghan children are married under the age of 15, while 52% are married under age 18. The Tufts University study found the marriage of child brides to be prevalent in the areas where they conducted research, i.e. in Badghis, Herat, Kabul, Kandahar, and Nangarhar provinces, with up to 30% of families in some provinces reportedly marrying girls off below the age of 15. The study further revealed that child brides often were given to substantially older men, and were usually the groom's second or third wife. The majority of parents said that they had married their under-age daughters primarily for economic reasons.¹⁷⁶ Similar information is provided by a report by Medica Mondiale (May 2004), which argues that the incidence of child marriage is high even in urban areas. The report refers to a Shelter Network study of a random sample of educated people in Herat, where 28.5% of respondents were married before the age of 16 years.

laws, and then there is custom and there is great poverty."¹⁷⁷ It should be stressed, however, that the custom of accepting bride wealth in return for giving a daughter in marriage is not equivalent to a sale and is not considered as such. The family of the bride is supposed to spend part of the bride-wealth on the girl's trousseau and on wedding celebrations. When the PDPA government in 1978 tried to abolish the custom of bride price, it was met with strong resistance.

Arranged marriages also raise the question of whether forced marriages occur. Amnesty International reports that cases of forcible marriage have come to the attention of the courts, but that these have failed to initiate any criminal proceedings against the accused. Since marriages are considered a contractual relationship between two families rather than between two individuals, the transactional aspect of marriage may take over, with girls being exchanged to settle or consolidate economic or political relations between families or even tribal groups. The question of the girl's (and in many cases also the groom's) consent hardly counts in these contexts. According to the Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission, the limitations on access to justice for women have contributed to attempted suicide, suicide, and self-immolation. Over a hundred young women in Herat province reportedly have set themselves on fire, and dozens more in Badakhshan province jumped into the Kokcha River and drowned themselves to escape arranged marriages. The governor of Herat and high-level government officials reportedly condemned women who committed self-immolation to avoid

¹⁷⁶ Feinstein International Famine Center, 2004, p.109

¹⁷⁷ Kaufman, 2003

forced marriages as those who dishonor traditions,¹⁷⁸ and were presumably seen as having 'bad *tarbia*' (see discussion of *tarbia* above).

The right of divorce rests with a husband rather than a wife. However, a woman has the right to a judicial divorce while a husband can divorce his wife through extra-judicial pronouncement of a divorce (*talaq*) either orally or in writing. The grounds for judicial separation include the husband suffering an incurable disease, his failure or inability to maintain his wife, his absence from his wife without reason for more than three years or his imprisonment for ten years or more, in which event the wife can ask for divorce after the first five years of imprisonment.¹⁷⁹ Divorce is not common in Afghanistan, and it is considered shameful for a woman to seek divorce. She also loses custody over older children and her livelihood, and has to return to her own family if they will accept her.

Box 12: Temporary Refuges for Women

In line with their view that advocacy is about 'doing' rather than about 'talking', a small number of Afghan women have taken the initiative to provide temporary protective care for women or girls who have left home to escape from some unacceptable event in their lives. Originally pioneered by Shuhada, three more organizations have developed similar protective services in Kabul and Nimroz. All aim to provide a combination of legal, health, psycho-social, economic and non-formal educational care in order to enhance women's capacities and opportunities for their continued life. Contrary to fears articulated by women as well as men that such centers will attract women and girls away from the wishes of their families, the refuges are very discreet. They accept clients through network referrals rather than on an 'open-door basis', and usually promote mediation with families via professionals as the first line of action. Catering for a range of women's issues, including severe domestic violence and a first-stop for women released from prison on Eid*, one additionally accepts young female orphans who, after thirteen years, are considered too old to be maintained in orphanages. Like other women, they are provided with livelihood skills and, most importantly, with formal education including computer usage and English.

* It is customary for the President to release prisoners on Eid, including several women, among whom some find it unsafe to return home immediately. They seek out the Ministry of Women's Affairs, which has a close partnership with women's refuges for providing temporary shelter while longer-term solutions are worked out by legal professionals.

¹⁷⁸ Feinstein International Famine Center, 2003, p.104-105

¹⁷⁹ Lau, 2002, p. 25

Zina

With the extreme focus on honor, shame and precautionary measures to control women's sexuality, it is little wonder that adultery is considered a serious crime. Adultery and other unlawful sexual activity are referred to as "*zina*"¹⁸⁰ crimes in Afghanistan. Although men may be accused or convicted of *zina* crimes,¹⁸¹ Amnesty International notes that the criminal justice system places disproportionate emphasis on the prosecution of women for *zina* crimes. (see Box 12) Rape is also considered to be included in or conflated with *zina*, as set out in the Penal Code. The problem created by this aspect of the law is illustrated by the comment of a woman prosecutor to Amnesty International when asked about the question of prosecution for rape. "You see we have a problem in our civil code. If a woman comes forward to report rape she is likely to be arrested for *zina*." During the years of internal conflict, rape and sexual violence were used by armed groups as a means of dishonoring and intimidating families and whole communities. Boys too fell prey to abduction and sexual assault. In the absence of effective mechanisms to investigate gender related violence, the vast majority of such violations continue to go unreported and are almost never subject to investigation or prosecution.¹⁸²

Box 13: Defense Lawyers for Justice to Women

Medica Mondiale is enhancing the skills and capacity of defense lawyers to deal with cases strictly within the provisions of the existing laws; in one instance the release of a woman was secured on the basis of procedural issues alone. The organization prepares and distributes to relevant ministries and women's agencies booklets on marriage law and divorce and rights after arrest. It has produced, in collaboration with the Supreme Court, guidelines for defense attorneys in Dari. Over a period of ten months, Medica Mondiale has secured a release rate of 68% (116 cases) of imprisoned women. In Kabul the 46% of *zina* crimes recorded in January 2004 have been reduced to 27% by June. This was achieved by processing *zina* cases more rapidly on the basis of lack of evidence brought to court and the successful defense presented by the counsel. In other cases, divorce and custody of children has been granted to women.

¹⁸⁰ *Zina* refers to adultery or fornication, i.e. sexual intercourse between persons who are not in a state of legal matrimony

¹⁸¹ In June 2002, about 30 women were confined in Kabul jail, the majority of whom were, according to the Law Section of the Ministry of Women's Affairs, detained for a variety of offences related to family law, such as refusing to live with their husbands, refusing to marry a husband chosen by their parents, or for having run away from either the parental or the matrimonial home (Lau, 2002)

¹⁸² Amnesty International, 2004

The Criminal Code also prescribes *hadd*¹⁸³ punishments for crimes such as theft, adultery and sex before marriage. These punishments include the payment of fines and retaliation on the part of the victim for crimes that are against Shari'a law. For example, the *hadd* punishment for adultery requires the stoning to death of convicted persons. The Penal Code also permits mitigation of sentences for murders claimed to have been committed in defense of honor. For example, a husband who murders his wife when she is found committing adultery is exempted from punishment for murder on that basis.

Inheritance

Women's inheritance rights are observed in a number of communities in Afghanistan and disregarded in others. The Civil Law, prepared in the mid-1970s and supposedly used by the courts, is clear on the property rights of widows (and daughters), but less clear on how the division of property is to be conducted. Customary practices tend to override both Shari'a (or what is locally understood as Shari'a) and civil law.¹⁸⁴ According to Islamic Law, a daughter inherits half of a son's share and a wife is entitled to only 1/8 of her husband's estate. It was demonstrated in previous chapters that women's right to inherit land is more nominal than real in most cases, as the woman may either transfer the land to her brothers to retain their support and protection, or if she keeps the land it would normally be her male relatives who actually control the land, what to cultivate on it and whether to sell it or not. Women are generally considered to have received their rightful share in the form of the 'trousseau' they bring into their marriage.

Informal Justice Systems

There is heavy reliance on informal justice mechanisms in Afghanistan in the form of *jirga*, among Pashtuns and *shura* among Dari-speakers, consisting of the elders¹⁸⁵ of all lineages and/or extended families of a village or tribal group.¹⁸⁶ The *jirga* and *shura* resolve community problems, including those related to land, property, the family and crime. Since the *jirga* and *shura* throughout Afghanistan are exclusively comprised of men, women are unable to approach these informal mechanisms without the support and assistance of a male family

¹⁸³ *Hadd* refers to punishment laid down for acts forbidden in the Qur'an. The *hadd* is a right or claim of Allah and no pardon or amicable settlement is possible once the case has been brought before the judge

¹⁸⁴ Wily, 2004a, p.51-52

¹⁸⁵ *Spin girey/risb-i safedan*, i.e. "white-beards")

¹⁸⁶ Boesen, 2004

member. In the process of decision making the *jirga* and *shura* apply different sources of law, including Shari'a law, tribal law and other customary law. The predominance of customary law in the *jirga/shura* decisions is by and large to the disadvantage of women, as customary law throughout Afghanistan tends to grant less rights to women than Islamic law or civil law in matters relating to inheritance, property and marriage. The inaccessibility of the *jirga* and *shura* to women also exacerbates the problem of impunity in relation to crimes against women, for example in cases of so-called 'honor killings' for which the perpetrators are generally not punished.

Customary law takes its point of departure in notions of restorative and reparative justice rather than the notion of retributive justice typical of present-day Western law and International law. Rather than being sent to prison for a wrong committed, a criminal offender will be required to pay compensation to the victim and ask forgiveness.¹⁸⁷ Sometimes these cases tend to be settled through material compensations only, and punishment for adultery is based on Shari'a. The norms vary considerably by tribal and regional groups, with Pashtuns and some Tajik groups in the North punishing adultery and elopement with the death sentence for the couple. It is also common to demand girls from the culprit's family as compensation in murder cases. Judicial officials, detainees and members of local *jirgas* in Mazar, Jalalabad and Herat reported adherence to similar practices.¹⁸⁸ A girl who is so 'exchanged', is then forcibly married to a male member of the victim's family. While such crimes are referred to as *bad*, different fines are assessed for different *bad* depending on the severity of the crime.¹⁸⁹ Amnesty International points out that this "practice... violates the prohibitions against slavery and discrimination and also constitutes torture or cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment."¹⁹⁰

Women's Voice in the Public Sphere

Customary systems of local governance have existed for generations in Afghanistan, and in many areas they are still functioning today. While the *jirga/shura* in principle is democratic and operates through consensus, only men can participate in it. The *jirga* principle has been

¹⁸⁷ Khurram, 2003

¹⁸⁸ Amnesty International, 2003

¹⁸⁹ *Bad* refers to crimes ranging from saying an improper word to murder or violating someone's *namus* (reputation/chastity). (Khurram, 2003)

¹⁹⁰ Amnesty International, 2003

elevated to national level right since the foundation of Afghanistan in 1747, when a grand *jirga* of Pashtun tribes elected Ahmad Shah Durrani as their king, as 'the first among equals'. Ever since, a grand *jirga* (*Loya Jirga*) has been seen as embodying the truest representation of the Afghan people.¹⁹¹ Since the *jirga* passing the 1964 Constitution, women have been granted a certain representation in the national level *jirgas*. This is not the case at local level, however.

Local Level: Today, Afghan women countrywide have virtually no role in selecting local leaders and have no or extremely limited involvement in decision making in their villages and communities. This observation is confirmed by all of the case studies and lately also by the comprehensive *NRVA* survey. The Tufts University study showed that the majority of village respondents report that rural Afghan women have no voice in selecting village, area, or district leaders or any other public official. In Badghis, Kandahar and Nangarhar, 100% of both men and women respondents stated that women have no role in selecting village leaders. In Herat and Kabul, over 95% of both male and female respondents said that women have no role in selecting village leadership.¹⁹²

The Government has launched the ambitious National Solidarity Program (NSP) which aims ultimately at covering the whole of Afghanistan with establishment of democratically elected Community Development Committees (CDCs). These committees will exercise a measure of self-governance through administration of block grants for reconstruction and development. The CDC concept is in line with the *jirgalshura* tradition, although its members are elected rather than selected - but it breaks with traditions by encouraging the equal participation of women. The NSP experiment grants Afghan women their first opportunity to participate in local level politics - and it has been met with skepticism and resistance in a number of places, including suspicion that NSP is a 'foreign' and anti-Islamic program which aims at religious conversion and abolition of traditional Afghan values, especially concerning women and family.¹⁹³

The reluctance to let women participate in decision-making at the community level seems to be closely associated with notions of *purdah* and family honor, as it opens the door for women's participation in public affairs. Hence there were two hurdles - one, to get acceptance

¹⁹¹ Olesen, 1995 discusses the constitutional development in Afghanistan and the varying notions of legitimacy of power inherent in these

¹⁹² Feinstein International Famine Center, 2004: 89

¹⁹³ Boesen, 2004, p. 28-29

of women's participation in elections to CDCs, and thereafter, acceptance of inclusion of elected female candidates in the CDC. In most communities it was accepted that women participate in the elections, but only in a few places were the communities ready to accept that that an elected woman should be sitting with male fellow candidates deciding on community priorities. Objections would primarily come from the elected women's family, whose honor would be tainted by such a public exposure of a female family member.

A number of communities, assisted by NGOs, have overcome this hurdle by forming separate women's CDCs which can then represent women's priorities at the local level. While this may seem like a rather modest beginning, it is in fact a very significant step forward toward granting women their constitutional rights as citizens. The next question is of course whether women will manage to get their voices heard, and that will probably prove considerably harder. The women of a women's *shura* in Aqcha put it in these words:

"First we have meetings among women about the projects. Then the women speak to the men they have permission to (speak with), then the men can present the problems to the (male) shura" (ibid, p. 56).

In a number of CDC elections, as many women voted as men, at 80-100%, and in several locations their number exceeded that of men voting.¹⁹⁴ A number of women did get elected to the CDC, and one CDC even chose a female member as chairperson. It is symptomatic that this person is a school teacher, since it is commonly held that *"women can first participate in elections after they have been educated"* - apparently a view also shared by illiterate men (!) Reservations regarding women's formal participation in community affairs are widespread and common, and female CDC members may find difficulties in getting their views heard and acknowledged, but women may yield indirect influence through male family members, a fact which is acknowledged by men.¹⁹⁵

Apart from the fact that women need their male relatives' (*mahram*) permission to vote, a major obstacle to their participation in local as well as national level politics is their limited

¹⁹⁴ Aide Memoire. NSP Supervision Mission, July 2004. World Bank

¹⁹⁵ This situation was experienced first hand in a rural development project in North Afghanistan during the 1970s, where female family members frequently were decisive for a family's position in community consultations, although only men participated in such meetings

access to information. Being largely illiterate and having very little mobility, women are mainly dependent on the radio for accessing information on their own - or through a male filter. A survey in 2003 found that 78% of Afghan men compared to only 61% of women in urban locations were aware of the constitutional process.¹⁹⁶

National Level: Free and fair elections in the Western style were introduced in Afghanistan with the 1964 Constitution. Despite the formal rights of all Afghan citizens to vote in the elections, there was in reality very limited participation in the rural areas. In the first election in 1965, only 10% voted, and subsequently in 1969 barely 20% cast their vote.¹⁹⁷ Observers ascribed part of the explanation to the great rural-urban divide - which paved the way for the Communist coup and the *jihad* in response to it.

The Interim and Transitional Governments of Afghanistan have given an important place to women, as noted earlier in this report. The Bonn Agreement highlights the need to recognize women's role in society, and the establishment of the Ministry of Women's Affairs provides a structure to focus on the advancement of women. Efforts to give women political voice can be seen from the appointment of three female ministers - the Minister of Public Health, Minister of Women's Affairs and State Minister for Women; the 14% of women representatives in the first Loya Jirga which chose the Transitional Government; and women's participation in the constitutional drafting commission, the Judicial Commission, the Electoral Body, and recognized in the Civil Service Reform program. A further step was taken by the Constitutional Loya Jirga in December 2003, which provided for equality between women and men before the law and allocated to women a minimum of two seats per province in the Lower House and half of the one-third membership of the Upper House selected by the President. In total this will secure for women at least a 25% share in the National Assembly.

The Loya Jirga was not without incidents related to women's roles and rights. Women delegates reportedly felt intimidated on several occasions by conservative male delegates. In one particular case, a female delegate verbally attacking *jihadi* fighters for human rights abuses in the past provoked so much wrath from some male delegates that it was considered prudent

¹⁹⁶ Oates & Helal, 2003, p.13

¹⁹⁷ Grevemeyer 1987

to provide her with protection. This was reminiscent of events in the Afghan Parliament in the 1960s, when the female Communist member (later minister in the PDPA government), Anahita Ratebzad was physically attacked by male colleagues over a speech she had made.¹⁹⁸

The Presidential election took place in October 2004, and was assessed both nationally and internationally as successful. Voter registration had progressed at a highly uneven pace with respect to both region and gender, and had been hampered by increasing numbers of terrorist attacks against UN and government personnel involved in the registration process. As the elections drew closer the level of intimidation also increased - against registration of voters in general, but also targeting female voter registration in particular, as bomb attacks against a mini-bus of female election workers in Nangarhar in June revealed. Despite the unevenness in voting patterns, the high turnout nationwide demonstrated that most Afghans opted to exercise their right to vote, even at some risk to their physical security.

The Afghan government, international donors, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) had taken many positive steps to encourage female voter registration in advance of the presidential election through civic education programs and hiring of female election workers. These efforts paid off, and more than 41% of registered voters were women, who accounted for around 40% of the votes cast. In the Pashtun areas, voting varied sharply along an east-south axis: Women formed more than 40% of voters in all but one of the eastern and southeastern provinces, while women cast less than 15% of total votes in Uruzgan, Zabul and Helmand. In two other provinces, Dai Kundi and Faryab, with largely Hazara and Uzbek populations, respectively, women comprised more than half of the voters, and in Nuristan there was gender parity.¹⁹⁹

Despite the various hiccups, the Presidential Election was largely successful and a great achievement for Afghanistan. The participation of women in the election was impressive in many locations and clearly illustrated women's wish to participate in national level politics and in decision-making affecting their own and their family's life and welfare. While a thorough assessment has not yet taken place, it can be safely assumed that lack of security was a major reason for the very low voter registration figures in southern provinces. The experience of the Presidential Election provides lessons for conducting successful Parliamentary Elections in 2005.

¹⁹⁸ Dupree, 1973

¹⁹⁹ International Crisis Group, 2004a

Policy Implications

....the gender element is critical, given we are moving from gender apartheid to gender integration, addressing the capabilities of women in the culturally appropriate way requires special attention. However, as shown by the Loya Jirga, when women take on these roles they are accepted, the key is not to discuss the role of women in Afghanistan, but to create facts on the ground regarding integration and women's roles.²⁰⁰

As citizens, Afghan women in principle have Constitutional equality but face legal inequality. Furthermore, there are great discrepancies between customary law, civil law and Islamic Law - as well as the informal justice system, which tend to grant women even fewer rights. Years of conflict and violence have further eroded the protection of women's (limited) rights, and a culture of impunity reigns as far as violence is concerned, including violence against women inside and outside the household. The deteriorating security situation in many parts of the country constitutes the most serious obstacle to promoting rule of law, respect for human rights and introduction of legal reform, which would benefit women more than any other group in society.

The policy implications of the situational assessment are twofold: On the short term there is the need to pursue women's legal rights more effectively within the confines of the current law:

- ✓ securing women's legal rights through legal education, legal aid, traditional mediation systems, discreet helplines and protected refuges
- ✓ information/awareness campaign about the unlawful nature and negative social effects of child marriage and forced marriage combined with incentives to delay marriage until reaching maturity, channeled through mass media and through community elders, religious leaders and teachers
- ✓ improving personal security of men, women and children and strengthen legal system to uphold rule of law
- ✓ support to women's groups at local and national level to enable them to utilize their constitutionally guaranteed political rights and representation to exert political influence

On the longer term there is the need to reform the legal framework/system to ensure that women gain an equal place in society:

- ✓ legal reforms to remove gender inequities within Family Law, in terms of marriage, marriage age, divorce and inheritance with inspiration from Muslim countries like Turkey and Egypt which have gone through a reform process

²⁰⁰ *Securing Afghanistan's Future, 2004*



Chapter-6

The Cost and Consequences of Continued Gender Exclusion



The Costs and Consequences of Continued Gender Exclusion

Previous chapters of this report have shown how gender gaps have come about as a result of the interplay between various forces. This chapter examines the costs and consequences of gender gaps and the possible policy levers to address them. The goal is to focus on those actions that would be a priority in that they would have high returns or be highly cost-effective. However, the 'economic' costs of gender exclusion should not be confused with purely pecuniary or monetized costs. Economics, properly understood, examines the ways to maximize self-assessed human well-being, in a world of limited resources-not just that part of human well-being that is measured in conventional national accounting as gross national product.

This distinction between the 'economic' in the broad sense and the 'pecuniary' is particularly important in discussing gender. Gender is, by definition, a generated construct that invokes values (religious, cultural or social) in ascribing behaviors to the sexes that are considered appropriate in a given time, place and social context. Suggesting that, simply because a policy action might raise measured GDP or have high pecuniary returns, it therefore has high *economic* returns, even though this action is in conflict with social or cultural values, represents a misunderstanding of economic analysis. This distinction is obviously important in Afghanistan, where as previous chapters demonstrate, the discussion of appropriate gender roles has been a very divisive and highly politicized issue.

This chapter therefore begins with an analysis of those investments that have high economic returns-in well-being, monetary terms or both-and moves from options that are

less controversial to those that may be considered more challenging to traditional norms and values.

Education. Many would claim that education for girls is a basic human right, while others would argue that education for girls is justified by the returns measured in purely pecuniary terms. But even for those who believe that the role of women should be limited strictly to the household sphere, there are four strong justifications for investments in educating girls that do not depend on monetary returns. First, education improves women's own health, particularly in reducing maternal mortality. Second, evidence from around the world suggests that education improves the health of women's own children (through better information, better decisions, more effective use of medical services). Third, improving women's education tends to improve the education of their children, male and female. Fourth, education of women improves their productivity in household tasks. Priority attention to expanding and extending the schooling of girls does not rely on assumptions that women will work for wages but can be fully justified *economically* even without any appeal to pecuniary returns.

Health. Similarly on the health side, particularly with respect to reproductive health, some assume that reducing fertility is a goal that policy makers should actively pursue, while others may argue that high fertility is a proper goal for households and society. But there are investments in improved health that are consistent with whatever goals about fertility or about women's roles that policy makers and households might have. Gender sensitive interventions in health, and even in reproductive health, can be justified under a wide range of values. First, interventions to reduce maternal mortality, which is astronomically high in Afghanistan, are good for poverty, good for the well-being of children, and even good for fertility. Second, healthier children require health interventions sensitive to the gender realities, and which reach women in ways that affect their health practices. Third, even *within* a given lifetime fertility level of a woman, the access and ability to control the *timing* of births can have major health benefits in that women can time and space their births and have healthier children. So even those who value large families should not value having a high aggregate fertility rate as that is accompanied by large numbers of child deaths and hence many 'replacement' births. For any given level of desired surviving number of children, improving access to reproductive health is important to well-being.

Contribution of Women to Economic Production. Afghanistan is one of the poorest countries in the world with a GDP of US \$ 4.7 billion (not including the opium economy) and GDP per capita of \$212.²⁰¹ After the Bonn Agreement in December 2001, efforts have been made to improve the economic condition of the country. It is increasingly felt that women can play a vital role in this mammoth task. We must, however, examine women's roles and contributions with a view to assessing the likely implications of removing the gender exclusions that currently exist. This sphere, as with any other aspect of gender relations, is highly charged. A first step is recognition of the vital work that women actually do and the role of that work, particularly among poor households. Second, programs targeted to raise the productivity of women in their *existing* household and economic work can have high returns. The issue of raising the participation of women in the paid labor force as an independent *goal* of policy is a subsequent consideration.

Comparison of Gender Indicators with other Muslim Countries

Islam is a religion that gives women certain protections and guarantees, and gender roles and relations in predominantly Muslim countries reflect social choices made in the past as well as in the present. There is no universally accepted 'ideal' in terms of gender roles, since people living in different societies and economies make different choices with respect to both social norms as well as economic arrangements. At the same time, there is overwhelming evidence from across the world that most of the gender inequalities that are evident in outcomes do not reflect conscious choices, and that removing these inequalities benefits the individuals concerned, the households and communities,, as well as the broader society and economy in a number of different ways. This evidence is briefly reviewed below, in particular the fact that even among Muslim countries, indicators on girl's education and reproductive health are much better than in Afghanistan.

Gender gaps in outcomes are not, of course, unique to Afghanistan. Table 20 gives a comparative picture by presenting data from selected countries with predominantly Muslim populations.²⁰² The comparative perspective suggests that certain traditional and cultural

²⁰¹ World Bank, 2004

²⁰² This picture using national averages is a broad generalization, as there exists considerable variation in the conditions of Afghan women (as also in other countries on the basis of their ethnicity, affluence, place of residence - rural or urban, marital status, age and so forth). See Barakat and Wardell, 2001

roles ascribed to women may have strong similarities across Muslim countries. This is demonstrated in the low work participation of women in all of these countries. The percentage of females in the labor force in Afghanistan, at 35.8%, is higher than in most of the other countries, with the exception of Malaysia and Indonesia.²⁰³

But nearly every other indicator of female well-being or of women's roles in Afghanistan is much lower than other Muslim countries. The adult female literacy rate in Afghanistan (though there are fears that the actual figure might be lower) is similar to Pakistan, but below that of other countries. The difference is much more striking if we look at the current gross primary enrollments of children, as both the level of enrollments and the gender gap are much greater in Afghanistan than elsewhere. Girls' gross primary enrollment is 108% in Indonesia, 90.4% in Iran, 67% in Saudi Arabia and 62% in Pakistan, compared to 40% in Afghanistan. Although the figure for Afghanistan represents enormous progress compared with the 5% girls' primary enrollment rate estimated in 1999 (Chapter 3, Table 5), there is still a long way to go for Afghanistan to catch up with the lagging comparator countries, let alone Iran or Indonesia.

Life expectancy at birth for both men and women is lowest in Afghanistan, and even more strikingly the difference between female and male life expectancy, which typically favors females, is worst in Afghanistan. While females have life expectancy ½ year longer in Afghanistan, the gap is 2.6 years in Saudi Arabia, 2.5 years in Pakistan, and 4 years in Indonesia.

One reason for low life expectancy among women is that the Maternal Mortality Rate in Afghanistan is alarmingly high. The rate of 1600 (see Chapter 2) exceeds that of any other country by a factor of three. The Total Fertility Rate varies widely across countries with Islamic populations. The TFR in Iran is 2.4, in Indonesia 2.4, in Saudi Arabia 4.6 and in Pakistan it is 5.1 - compared to 6.8 in Afghanistan.

These simple international comparisons demonstrate that first, there is wide variation among Muslim countries in their indicators of female education, health status, and reproductive health. Second, on nearly every indicator Afghanistan lags considerably behind the other

²⁰³ This comparison is only indicative, as different methodologies may have been followed in data collection

countries-even when compared with countries that some consider as quite 'conservative' in their interpretations of Islam and with quite an active role of Islam in political decisions-such as Iran, Saudi Arabia, and Pakistan.

Education

Prior to the Taliban rule, many attempts had been made to raise education levels of women.²⁰⁴ Women belonging to the elite classes in Kabul in the late 1970s had access to education and careers. Today, according to the World Bank, female literacy rate is just 21%, though there are fears that the actual figure might be even lower. However, girls constitute 30 % of the student population in Afghanistan. Even though this is a massive increase compared to the years prior to the Taliban restrictions on girls' education, it is still low, and the aggregate figure hides considerable variation within the country. In southern and eastern parts of Afghanistan girls' enrollment rates are very low.²⁰⁵ Gross enrollment rates at the primary level in 2000 were estimated to be a mere 4% for girls compared to 29 % for boys.²⁰⁶

Policy actions to raise participation of girls in school can be justified on a number of grounds, but a focus on just four of the non-monetized benefits of girls' schooling that generate support across a range of values and cultural norms will suffice.

Women's Education and Women's Health. Even if women's primary role is in the home, women who are healthy and who can survive childbirth constitute an important benefit for the society. Evidence across countries suggests that educated women are better able to access formal pre-natal and post-natal care and thereby improve their own health outcomes.

Only 34% of Egyptian women with no education received antenatal care, compared to 75% of women with a high school or college degree.²⁰⁷ According to *NFHS*²⁰⁸ (1999) of India, the

²⁰⁴ Among the reforms introduced by King Amanullah and Queen Soraya was compulsory education for both boys and girls and plans for coeducational schools. Similarly, among the rights granted to women in the constitution of 1964 was the right to education. (Source: Barakat and Wardell, 2001)

²⁰⁵ <http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/afghanistan.html>

²⁰⁶ World Bank, 2004

²⁰⁷ *Demographic and Health Surveys, 2000*

²⁰⁸ *National Family Health Survey, 1999*

percentage of deliveries attended by trained midwives is very low for women with no education.

Education imparts basic skills that can allow the poor to better manage their resources, and thus improvements in health and attitudes can take place even without other major changes in the surrounding infrastructure.

Maternal Education and Child Health. Evidence from cross-national studies, studies across regions within countries, and comparisons across households consistently points to an important role of maternal education in child health. Recent studies of the determinants of child mortality across countries of the world find an important role for maternal education—even controlling for income, income distribution, and public spending on health. States in India (such as Kerala) with high female literacy rates are also the ones with high marriageable age and better health indicators. Evidence from households in Egypt suggests that of married women married between 25 and 29 years of age, those with no education had married at an average age of 18 years and had their first child by the age of 20 years, as opposed to 23 and 25 years as reported by women with secondary or higher education.²⁰⁹ Mother's education of one to three years is associated with a 20% decline in risk of childhood death. Each additional year of schooling of mothers translates into a 5–10% decline in child mortality. A comparison of child mortality between mothers with no formal education and those with secondary education in Egypt showed it to be twice as high among children born to the former.²¹⁰

There are a variety of channels of causation from better-educated mothers to healthier children. An educated mother is likely to better manage basic childcare and nutritional aspects of diet, and in general to ensure better elementary health care. Also, since the timing of births is another important proximate determinant of child mortality, the fact that more educated women are likely to marry later and space child-births, therefore, improves mortality. The link between more education and delayed age at marriage is well known.²¹¹ Early marriage spells a cessation of education for girls and premature assumption of domestic and child care responsibilities.

²⁰⁹ Roudi-Fahimi and Moghadam, 2003

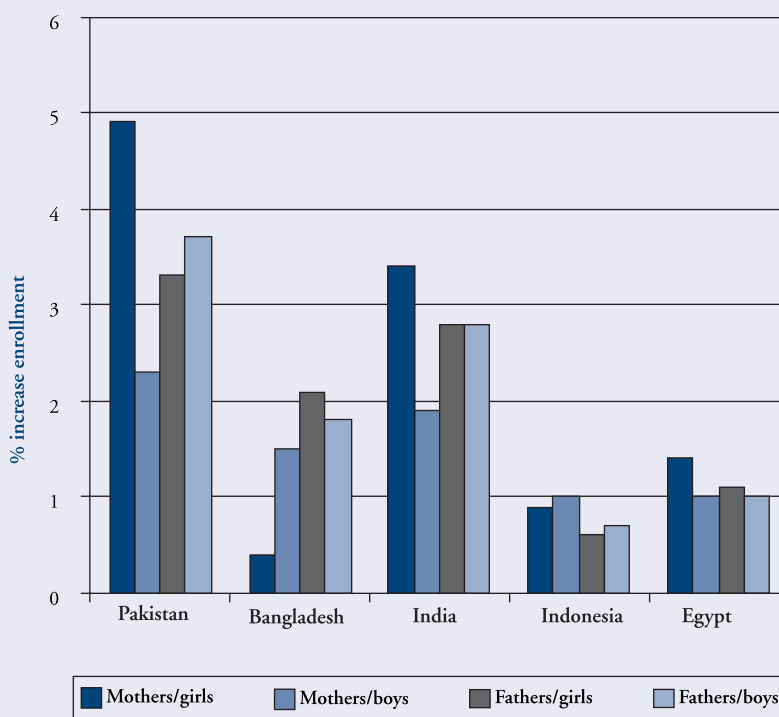
²¹⁰ The Mahbub-ul- Haq Development Centre, 1998

²¹¹ Jeffery and Basu, 1996

The linkage between female education and health has been emphasized in the SAF. It is noted that among the factors impeding improvements in public health is the low status accorded to women. Furthermore, it notes that preventive health practices are weak, which 'underscores the fundamental importance of education as a factor in improving public health, particularly the health of women as primary care givers in the home'.

Maternal Education and Child Education. An educated woman is likely to better support the education of her children, both boys and girls. In Egypt, mothers who had never attended school were more likely to cite the cost of education as a reason for not sending their daughters to school

Figure 4: Association of Enrollments with Maternal and Paternal Education for Girls and Boys aged 6-14



Source: Filmer, 1999, The Structure of Social Disparities in Education: Gender and Wealth. Gender and Development Working Paper No. 5

than for not sending their sons to school.²¹² States in India with huge gender differentials in school attendance rates are also usually the ones where gaps between male and female literacy rates are high. In this context, Klasen (1999) also notes the externalities of gender equality in education at the household level. He says that equally educated siblings can support and strengthen each other's educational success, while similarly educated couples can support each other's education interests.

Figure 4 shows regression-based estimates of the percentage increase in school enrollment of children aged 6-14 that are typically associated with an increase in maternal or paternal education by one year-even after controlling for many other observable correlates of enrollments-in several countries with predominantly Muslim populations and in India. The impact of maternal education is large for both boys and girls, typically greater than the association with paternal education. In Pakistan (based on a *DHS* data set from the early 1990s) and in India (based on the *NFHS* in the early 1990s), the impact of maternal education was much stronger for girls than for boys, while Bangladesh shows the opposite pattern and others (Indonesia, Egypt) essentially have equal impacts.

Increasing women's productivity in existing activities. While there is substantial evidence that increases in a woman's education raises her wages in market activities, there is also evidence that her productivity in household and non-market production increases as well.

With all of the evidence presented above for the strong association between girl's/women's schooling and improved outcomes, there is nevertheless a problem in identifying precisely what is the causal impact of schooling and what is merely attributable to girls who receive more schooling are different in some respect. If, for instance, more educated girls come from households of higher socio-economic status, there might be a strong association between schooling completed and child health even if there is no true causal impact of schooling. This problem is difficult to address empirically.

Policy Measures to Raise Girl's Schooling

Providing primary education facilities to all children is thus an investment which can be expected to have a range of beneficial outcomes. As more schools are opened and girls' enrollment is encouraged, there is likely to be a skewed response from different parts of the

²¹² *Demographic and Health Surveys*, 2000

country. It is also likely that there will be a larger proportion of girls in the lower grades. Given the slower growth of demand in rural areas, over the next five years we could hope that, in accordance with the targets for the education sector that, on average enrollment may go up to 55% for girls²¹³ or 9,900,000 (see Table 18 below). Assuming that this population is equally divided over each of the five grades in primary school, if additional schooling can be supplied at the same average cost as existing schooling then the expenditure for providing schooling to 55% of girls works out to be 2.6% of the GDP or \$122 million per year.

However, in the more remote rural areas the demand for girls schooling may be low as a result of the strength of traditional gender roles, which keep daughters at home to help with sibling care and other domestic duties, or care of livestock, etc. - creating a situation where, as some would put it the 'right of a girl to education is unfairly pitted against the obligations of a daughter.'²¹⁴

Table 18: Cost of Incremental Enrollment of Girls in School

Grade	Number of girls	Per capita expenditure of sending girls to school (AFN)	Per capita expenditure (\$) (49AFN = \$1)	Total expenditure
1	1 980 000	350	7.14	14 142 857.14
2	1 980 000	350	7.14	14 142 857.14
3	1 980 000	350	7.14	14 142 857.14
4	1 980 000	1 000	20.41	40 408 163.27
5	1 980 000	1 000	20.41	40 408 163.27
Total (Grades 1-5)	9 900 000			12 324 4897.96

Source: The Human Rights Research and Advocacy Consortium, 2004

Note: In the absence of grade specific data, it is assumed here that the relevant group is equally distributed over grades 1-5

²¹³ World Bank

²¹⁴ Karlekar, 2000, p. 91

While the availability of schools is the first necessity for bringing both boys and girls into school, special effort will be needed to bring girls into school and to keep them there so that they are able to complete an acceptable level of schooling. In other countries it has been seen that there is need to ensure women teachers, separate toilets, and to see that schools are as close to habitations as possible. In addition, incentives are often found useful in keeping girls in school. Since many young girls are expected to look after their younger siblings, the availability of crèche facilities is often imperative to bring girls to school.

It will also be important to provide bridge courses to allow both girls and boys who have dropped out of school to be able to re-enter the system.

Health

On the health front there are two key gender-related issues irrespective of the cultural values one adheres to. First, considering women's role as mothers and caregivers within the family means that maternal mortality and the measures to reduce it are central issues. Since motherhood is important then certainly it should also be made as safe as possible. Second, addressing the ways in which gender exclusion and the disempowerment of women raises child mortality is also a key issue.

Maternal mortality. While a great deal needs to be done on many fronts to ensure that all Afghans have access to basic health care, it is especially alarming to note the very high rates of maternal mortality. The death of the mother has important implications for the health of children and other members. A study in Bangladesh found that a mother's death sharply increased the chances of death for all of her children up to the age of 10 years, particularly girl children, while the death of the father did not have any significant impact.²¹⁵

A woman's death also negatively impacts on the schooling of her children, particularly in poor families, where younger children enroll later while older children drop out. A study in India found that when women die, the survival of the household is increasingly challenged because men are unaccustomed to managing the household budget and affairs. The family suffers emotional as well as economic loss. At the societal level, there is a loss of future generations and their potential contributions do not materialize.²¹⁶

²¹⁵ The Mahbub-ul- Haq Development Centre, 2000

²¹⁶ UNFPA, 2000

Policy Measures to Reduce Maternal Mortality

Facilities. To ensure that children that are born survive into healthy adulthood, and to extend the outreach of the health services and ensure that women are able to access these facilities, determined efforts have to be made to increase the number of female doctors and other female health care providers. According to *Securing Afghanistan's Future*, at present only 40% of Afghans have access to Basic Package of Health Services (BPHS), an initiative of the Afghan government that seeks to provide basic primary health care. But the access of women is even more limited since most health services do not have any trained female personnel, and cultural barriers often do not allow female patients to be examined by male doctors.

Empowerment over Access Decisions. Eighty-seven percent of respondents in the Physicians for Human Rights 2002 survey reported having to obtain permission from a husband or male relative to see a trained health professional all of the times, and another 8% some of the time. Information and awareness raising among men and women about maternal health would address this problem.

Raising the Marriageable Age. The age at marriage for females as reported by the Physicians for Human Rights is 15 years though the reported desired age at marriage is reasonably high at 18 years. In recent years there has been a trend toward marrying of daughters at an early age, referred to as 'disposal of daughters' in the hope of securing a good bride price as a coping mechanism against poverty and insecurity.²¹⁷ In order that the marriage age may be brought closer to the desired age of 18 years,²¹⁸ the Government may initiate an information/awareness campaign about the unlawful nature and negative social effects of child marriage and forced marriage combined with incentives to delay marriage until reaching maturity.

Gender and Child Mortality. In addition to high maternal mortality, Afghanistan also has high mortality of children. While disentangling the separate dimensions of high mortality is difficult, there is little question that the limited decision-making power of women within the household and the limited ability of women to interact outside of the home contribute to high child mortality.

²¹⁷ Schutte, 2004

²¹⁸ Physicians for Human Rights, 2002

This implies that policy actions to improve child mortality must take into account the existing gender disparities and cultural sensitivities in Afghanistan. Public health messages need to be provided in a way that reaches women. Health services must be provided in a way that is consistent with accepted norms for action. It should be of great interest that Iran, with strong Islamic participation in public and political life, has experienced a spectacular improvement in child mortality through a concerted effort on locally based workers in primary health.

Gender and Markets

Policy actions to raise the enrollment of girls in schooling and to improve maternal mortality and the ability of women to act to improve child mortality can be justified as priorities even if one accepts a limited view of the role of women. In contrast, the active participation in the market economy of women as paid labor, employees, or as self-employed businesspersons is far more controversial. As with any form of discrimination, gender-based restrictions on economic participation lower overall production and output per head. This section makes two key points. First, women *do*, in fact, contribute to the economy. Moreover, since these economic contributions often come from very poor households raising the productivity of women in their existing activities is a priority action. Second, there are large economic costs to maintaining the exclusion of women from education and their contribution to the market economy. While some might argue that these costs are worth bearing in the interests of preserving other values in the cultural context of Afghanistan, it is still worth documenting the costs.

Structure of the Economy and Women's Contribution

The structure of the economy in 2003 was heavily skewed in favor of agriculture (52% of GDP) with smaller contributions from industry and services at 24% each. *Securing Afghanistan's Future (SAF)*, a comprehensive document presented at the international conference of donors held in Berlin puts forward an argument for an average annual growth rate of 9% over a 12-year period. Such a growth rate most likely cannot be achieved without making special efforts to involve women in the development process. Clear data on the role of women in each sector is difficult to obtain, partly because of the limitations of data generally but also partly because in Afghanistan, as elsewhere, women's roles and contributions are often invisible and undervalued. However, using the information available it is possible to demonstrate the key role that women play in their *current* economic roles, and even more so in their *potential* contributions.

Agriculture: The centrality of agriculture in achieving high overall economic growth has been emphasized by the *SAF*. Agriculture at present contributes 52% of the legal GDP, and in the next 12 years even with rapid growth of industries and services, agriculture is going to constitute more than 40% of GDP (*SAF*, 2004). The role of women in the agriculture of Afghanistan has been highlighted in the earlier sections of this report. Usually poor and very poor women work in the fields while women from well-to-do households are mainly involved in agricultural tasks performed within the house. However, sufficient data is not available to quantify the extent of women's participation in agriculture. As per the *Nationwide Risk and Vulnerability Assessment (NRVA)* carried out in July- September 2003, 6.2% of female groups reported being involved in harvesting and another 11.9% were in 'other farm work.' The *NRVA* surveyed selected categories of work only, and weeding for example was excluded. This means that the findings are likely to be underestimates of women's actual involvement in agriculture. Another factor leading to underestimation would be under-reporting resulting from the social stigma associated with women working in the field. In addition to agriculture, women are also involved in care of livestock and other related activities. The successful shift from poppy cultivation to cultivation of other crops also requires that the nature and extent of women's participation be recognized. Men of the household decide whether or not to cultivate poppy, but women's labor contribution to poppy production should be kept in mind when assessing the feasibility of alternatives to poppy cultivation.

The Informal Economy: An estimated 80-90% of the economy is informal, including both agricultural and non-agricultural activities. Generally speaking, in developing countries the informal economy contributes as much as 40% of the GNP.²¹⁹ A feature of the informal economy in Afghanistan is the large proportion of women involved. In India as many as 96% of women are in informal employment, including a variety of types of work ranging from casual labor, sub-contracted work and home based work. The informal economy in Afghanistan includes a wide range of legal but informal activities, as well as the illegal opium economy.

The work participation rate of women is estimated at 35.8 %, ²²⁰ but the *NRVA* survey found 55.5% of women to be engaged in some form of economic activity, in agriculture, home

²¹⁹ Schneider, 2002

²²⁰ <http://devdata.worldbank.org/external/dgsector.asp?W=0&RMDK=110&SMDK=473885>

based work or services. In some regions such as the Northeast it is as high as 90.2%. Even if we question the exact numbers, there is little doubt that much of women's work is currently unrecorded and underestimated, and that their actual contribution to GDP is higher. A conservative estimate (using the current low wage rates for women) suggests that it may be 1.5 times or more what it seems to be (and this is excluding reproductive work from our calculations).

Women's work needs to be situated in the overall macro-economy. There are two ways of looking at the current activities of women. One is to assume that home-based work, for example, is part of an informal economy that will automatically decline with growth and hence does not merit further attention. This has not been the experience, in any significant degree, in other countries, however. The reason is not just that home-based work is attractive to women since it enables them to combine work with homemaking and child care and is acceptable in a society where women's mobility is traditionally constrained. It is equally attractive to entrepreneurs - it is an efficient system of production in certain socio-cultural contexts and in industries where technical change is relatively

Table 19: Estimates of Women's Contribution to GDP

Female wage rate	\$ 0.75 per day (Source: NRVA 2003)
Assuming 180 days of work per annum, average female wages pa	\$ 135
Assuming 240 days of work per annum, average female wages pa	\$180
Female population in age group 15-49 years	6, 672, 775 (USAID Country Health Statistical Report, 2003)
At 55% Work Participation rate (NRVA, 2003)	3, 670, 026 or 3.67 million
Total earnings	\$ 135 * 3.67 million, or \$ 495 million (@ of 180 days of work pa), or \$ 180 * 3.67 million or \$ 660 million (@ 240 days of work pa)
As a % of GDP (\$4.7 billion)	10.5% (@ of 180 days of work pa), or 14% (@ of 240 days of work pa)

slow. Strong social networks make sub-contracting feasible from the viewpoint of the employer; in addition there are savings in costs of space, capital equipment, and even direct labor costs.²²¹

If home-based work is not an anachronism in a globalizing world, what is its growth potential? The best example of its potential probably comes from the experience of Third Italy.²²² Craft production in this regard has been an energizing factor in growth. 'Young workers in the so-called Third Italy can make the ascent from the sweatshop to the high technology machine, or design center, earning correspondingly higher wages or even setting up their own high technology firms'.²²³ The interplay between social and economic factors proved to be beneficial. Small firms using craft methods and based on family labor were innovative and quick to respond to changing market conditions. Active inter-firm cooperation and legal privileges helped to make this a leading force in growth.

Policy Implications of Women's Contributions to the Economy

Women's work in the informal economy is a fact of life, but it is also a basis for sustainable production and economic growth. To achieve its potential, there needs to be investment in the education and skills of women, and in institutions that would support their production activity through credit, market linkages, etc. Central to this approach is changing the perception of the woman (and of the males in the family as they ultimately would need to support her in being an active economic agent) to see herself as a productive agent, contributing to the welfare of the household through her home making activities but also to the growth of the economy through her engagement in agriculture, home based work, or services. Changing this perception can also alter the economic behavior and responsiveness of women in their economic roles.

For example, home-based work is usually characterized by the absence of an employer, no written contract, no fixed hours of work, no assurance of any minimum return. If this work

²²¹ National Council of Applied Economic Research (NCAER), 2001

²²² "Third Italy" - an idiomatic term applied to the proliferation of small scale skilled production units associated particularly with recent developments in part of Italy (chiefly in regions of the N-E and Central Italy). The economic development in the 'Third Italy', based mainly on industrial districts, has been contrasted both with that of the North and with the backwardness of the South

²²³ Bagchi, 1999:27

were recognized as productive work and captured more accurately in official statistics, the woman worker would become (a) visible as a worker; (b) perhaps part of a group of workers, in an association or union of sorts, through which she would have access to some benefits; (c) perhaps be able to claim a minimum wage; and (d) her access to savings institutions may go up, as well as access to training and skill upgradation.

One of the consequences of underestimating women's economic contribution is overstating of productivity and also a potential for inefficient allocation of resources. For example, if the time spent by women on agricultural tasks within the household premises, such as cleaning and preparation of seeds, separation of wheat from the husk to make flour and so on, is ignored, productivity as measured in terms of total man-days is overestimated and the total input costs in terms of labor underestimated. Such a scenario is not an efficient outcome for the economy and

Box 14: The SEWA Experience

The experience of the Self Employed Women's Association in Ahmedabad, India (SEWA) shows that through its activities of organizing workers new employment has been generated, new access to benefits, and additional contributions to such agencies as insurance companies. For example, SEWA estimates that the additional benefits (in the form of wage rate increases and other benefits such as scholarships, social security benefits, etc) were 12% of the total earnings from new urban employment.²²⁴ The combination of development intervention and trade union action represented by SEWA has allowed women to change somewhat their behavior as economic agents. For example, they could now take out insurance to help in dealing with medical expenses and so forth; make savings of small amounts to later use it to build a house. The Rural Women's Development Project, which has organized poor women in nine states in India, also shows promising achievements. Assets have been built up, sources of income diversified with the growth of non-farm work. It is reported that over 30% of sampled members have acquired functional literacy after joining the self help groups, 70% of members are now accessing appropriate health services and 92 % are sending their daughters to school- compared to less than 65% in 2000.²²⁵ There are significant costs of informality that have been documented: bribes and the growth of the black economy, poor levels of human development as evidenced by high illiteracy and low health status, children out of school and in work. An improvement in the terms of work, through a measure of formalization, could have repercussions on social development outcomes as well as growth outcomes.

²²⁴ SEWA, 2000, p. 19

²²⁵ World Bank, 2004c

may lead to misallocation of resources. In certain cases, such as the carpet industry, non-recognition of women's role is especially serious as it means that the most important stage in the production process - that of production of the good or service - is itself not recognized. Furthermore, in order for carpets emerge as one of the major exports of Afghanistan, it is necessary that the industry be internationally competitive. This implies among other things an ability to meet the demands of international consumers. Consumers' tastes and preferences have to be passed down the production chain from the carpet exporters to the weavers of carpets. So there has to be a strong network linkage between the women weavers, the domestic traders and the carpet exporters. Apart from carpet weaving, other activities carried out within the household that have export potential include dried fruits, handicrafts and embroidery. If women's role is not adequately recognized, it will not be possible to harness the export potential of these activities. Building a world class, competitive export industry requires that all of the links in the value chain, right down to the home based woman worker, are included in the planning, technical information, training and marketing inputs that accompany industrial growth.

Formalization of women's participation in the labor force through recognition and certification is also likely to contribute increased revenue/ tax collections for the government. Even in the case of poor women who do not fall in the tax net, there are benefits from formalizing their participation in the labor force. Formality increases the claim of poor women to government-sponsored services, which in turn result in positive externalities for the economy both in the short run and the long run. For example, if a woman puts her children in childcare facilities, not only will the children gain in the long run but the woman will also be able to work more steadily and earn better. The latter may help to strengthen the accountability of the public service providers to their clients via the 'short route' of accountability as articulated by the *Country Economic Report*.²²⁶

Thus overall, Afghanistan's growth in the future rests critically on continuing and expanding contribution from its women workers, especially in agriculture and home-based work.

Costs of Gender Exclusion

Empirical evidence from other countries shows that there is a diverse range of benefits from increasing the allocation of resources to develop the capabilities of women. A considerable share

²²⁶ World Bank, 2004

of the export success of the South East Asian economies was based on female-intensive light manufacturing, whereas on the other hand gender inequality in South Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa may have reduced growth by 0.3% vis-à-vis the East Asian economies.²²⁷ Becker (1975) argued that if male and female labor are considered perfect substitutes, the economy wide discriminatory wages against women will not only generate a gain for men at the expense of women but will also reduce firms' profits and therefore investments and growth.²²⁸

Of the greatest relevance are the linkages between enhanced access to productive assets and increased productivity. While Afghan women participate in income generating activities and contribute significantly to the family's resources, they seldom own any productive asset. Even landed widows, who own their land, have limited rights - they cannot sell the land, as it has to be passed to sons or other male relatives.²²⁹ Limited access to productive assets such as land implies that women are not able to use it as collateral for credit. Evidence from African countries suggests that female farmers are as efficient as their male counterparts but are less productive because they have access to less productive inputs and human capital.²³⁰ In addition to increased productivity, access of women to family resources including land has been linked to child nutrition and child welfare.²³¹

New research carried out by Berta Esteve-Volart²³² for India also has relevance for Afghanistan. In her research she uses the data on the gender composition of the workforce by class from sixteen states of India for the period 1961-91 to examine the implications of gender discrimination in the labor market for economic development.²³³ She estimates that

²²⁷ Klasen, 1999

²²⁸ in Paternostro, 1999

²²⁹ Grace, 2004. She suggests that in some instances women were considered to own chicken. But income generated through selling eggs is limited and chickens are also more prone to disease than other livestock, which probably explains 'why mostly women and not men own chickens'

²³⁰ World Bank, 2003

²³¹ International Food Policy Research Institute has produced a series of studies that explores this link

²³² Esteve-Volart, 2004

²³³ She first analyses the implications of exclusion of women from managerial positions and second, the implications of complete exclusion of women from the labor market. Excluding women from managerial positions implies that skill of women as managers fail to be utilized, as a result the overall average skills of managers in the country is lower than it would be otherwise, which in turn translates into lower profits for firms and thereby lower growth

the economic costs of discrimination against women in the labor market are large: a 10% increase in the female-to-male ratio of managers increases GDP per capita by 2%, while a 10% increase in the female-to-male ratio of total workers increases GDP per capita by 8%. In particular, she estimates that if all Indian states had the labor market figures of Karnataka (a state that has relatively high ratios of female-to-male managers and female-to-male total workers), Indian GDP per capita would have been more than 30% higher over the period, 1961-91. She argues that the efficiency costs are larger in the non-agricultural sector, because there may be comparative physical advantages of men over women in agriculture. Another study in Latin America estimated that ending gender inequality in the labor market could increase women's wages by 50% while increasing national output by 5%.²³⁴

Education and Economic Growth

Securing Afghanistan's Future has cited the experience of East Asian economies in arguing the feasibility of a 9% growth rate in Afghanistan. One of the factors contributing to the high growth rate of the East Asian economies has been the rapid reduction in the gender gap in basic education, which has helped to reduce the relative disadvantage of women in social opportunities, including economic participation.²³⁵ Educating girls and women would open up new opportunities, allowing them to access new kinds of work, but also allowing the use of better technology and access to market information in existing work. Without substantial investment in education for both boys and girls, the expansion of the skill-based industrial production sector is clearly impossible. Lack of education not only constrains the immediate potential for human resource led development, but also stunts the future prospects for rapid human development.²³⁶ In an increasingly open global economy, countries with poor literacy rates and gender gaps in literacy tend to be less competitive in terms of attracting foreign direct investment, which seeks both skilled and cheap labor. Globalization has been accompanied by the increasing importance of small and medium-sized enterprises that create employment opportunities for women. A good example is the increased opportunities in business outsourcing in Asia. But education is a minimum need to be able to access these opportunities.²³⁷

²³⁴ UNFPA, 2000

²³⁵ Dreze and Sen, 2003

²³⁶ The Mahbub-ul- Haq Development Centre, 1998

²³⁷ Roudi-Fahimi and Moghadam, 2003

While reduction in the gender gap will contribute to higher rates of growth and a greater contribution to the economy by women, continuation of high gender gaps would constrain growth. Economic growth is affected (indirectly) because of the impact on rate of return to physical investment - poor quality of human resources as a result of gender bias implies low productivity and thereby low returns to investment. It is estimated that the latter alone can reduce per capita income growth in a country with a gender gap in education similar to that of African countries at present by 0.3%.²³⁸

Policy Implications

The experience of South Asian and other countries makes it abundantly clear that gender equality will not be achieved without careful analysis and appropriate policy intervention. Unless the government in Afghanistan takes such steps to improve the enrolment of girls and provide healthcare to its female population, gender gaps in the country are unlikely to improve.. In Table 21 below, we highlight the nature of investment in terms of resources, financial or otherwise, to achieve the objective of gender parity in Afghanistan, as well as the expected benefits from this.

Not surprisingly, given the current state of data in and about Afghanistan and the limited experience with a variety of actions, it is not possible to quantify precisely the impact of these actions. However, on the basis of other country experience, not only would the well-being of women, men and children improve as a result, but this will also have positive growth outcomes from a country perspective. While it is difficult to quantify the benefits precisely, given the current magnitudes of the gender disparities it is almost certainly the case that at the margin the direct and indirect benefits of policy actions to address these priority areas are much greater than the costs.

The analysis presented above suggests that from the perspective of gender, the three goals with the maximum potential return in the current economic, political, and social contest are: (i) ensuring that at least 55% of girls obtain a primary education over the next five years; (ii) a reduction in the maternal mortality rate to no more than one-quarter of its current level; and (iii) recognizing and supporting *existing* women's work in the informal economy.

Each of these goals will require a package of interventions: (i) To raise and extend schooling for girls, i.e. schooling infrastructure should be appropriate to girl's attendance; incentives

²³⁸ Klasen, 1999

designed to reduce the drop-out rate for girls. In addition, a range of special efforts and incentives need to be put in place to release girls from duties such as sibling care and housework and to alter the perception of their potential and future roles within the household, community and economy. (ii) To improve maternal mortality will require healthcare facilities appropriate to the remote rural context (particular for deliveries) with female health staff. In addition a range of efforts in the direction of raising awareness among men and women alike and making the health delivery system both pro-active and gender sensitive is needed to promote women's access. The pronounced geographical disparities would need to be addressed by provision of basic health care facilities throughout the country. (iii) To recognize and support women's work in the informal economy will require training and skills development within agriculture and livestock production, provision of credit, marketing facilities, securing of women's property rights, credit and skills training to business-women, technological and quality upgrading of traditional crafts to increase their potential for domestic and export markets. Furthermore, national statistics should be improved to capture and value women's work and economic contribution.

Table 20: An overview of Gender Gaps in Afghanistan and Neighboring Countries (2002)

Indicator	Afghanistan	Pakistan	India	Indonesia	Egypt	Iran	Malaysia	Saudi Arabia
GDP per capita (US \$ 2002)	212	408	487	817	1354	1652	3905	8612
Percent of total labor force ♦ Female	35.8	29.5	32.5	41.2	31.0	28.4	38.3	17.7
Adult literacy rate (2000) ♦ Male ♦ Female	<i>51</i> <i>21</i>	<i>57</i> <i>28</i>	<i>68</i> <i>45</i>	<i>92.5</i> <i>83.4</i>	<i>67.2</i> <i>43.6</i>	<i>83</i> <i>69</i>	<i>92.0</i> <i>85.4</i>	<i>84.1</i> <i>69.5</i>
Gross primary school enrolment (%) (2000) ♦ Male ♦ Female	29.0 4.1	83.7 62.0	107.4 59.6	111.0 108.0	100.0 93.0	93.8 90.4	97.0 97.0	69.0 67.0
Net primary school enrolment (%) ♦ Male ♦ Female	<i>42.1 (1993)</i> <i>14.5 (1993)</i>	<i>76.5</i> <i>56.7</i>	<i>90.6</i> <i>75.6</i>	<i>92.6</i> <i>91.7</i>	<i>92.2</i> <i>87.4</i>	<i>80.0</i> <i>78.3</i>	<i>95.1</i> <i>95.3</i>	<i>61.1</i> <i>56.5</i>
Life Expectancy at Birth (years) ♦ Male ♦ Female	43.0 43.5	62.6 65.1	62.6 64.2	<i>64.6</i> <i>68.6</i>	<i>66.6</i> <i>70.8</i>	68.3 70.3	<i>70.7</i> <i>75.6</i>	<i>71.0</i> <i>73.6</i>
Total Fertility Rate	<i>6.8</i>	<i>5.1</i>	<i>3.1</i>	<i>2.4</i>	<i>3.3</i>	<i>2.4</i>	<i>2.9</i>	<i>4.6</i>
Maternal Mortality Rate per 100, 000 live births	<i>1600</i>	<i>500</i>	<i>540</i>	<i>230</i>	<i>84</i>	<i>76</i>	<i>41</i>	<i>91</i>
Percent of deliveries attended by skilled health personnel	<i>12</i>	<i>20</i>	<i>43</i>	<i>64</i>	<i>61</i>	<i>90</i>	<i>97</i>	<i>23</i>

Note: 1. Figures in **bold** are World Bank figures
 2. Figures in *italics* are Unicef figures
 3. Figures that are neither bold nor italics are UNDP figures

Source: <http://devdata.worldbank.org/external/dgsector.asp?W=0&RMDK=110&SMDK=473885>
<http://unicef.org/infobycountry/index.html>
http://hdr.undp.org/statistics/data/indic/indic_123_1_1.html
Human Development Report, UNDP 2004

Table 21: Costs and Benefits of Eliminating Gender Gaps

Gender gap	Investments/Actions needed	Expected Direct Benefits	Expected Indirect Benefits
Education/ Literacy	Adult literacy courses available for women Open new girls' schools Recruitment of female teachers Ensure transport facilities where school is at a distance Gender sensitive curriculum Incentives to bring all girls to school Crèche facilities to release girls from burden of sibling care Bridge courses, accelerated learning opportunities Second chance education	Increased schooling for girls Schooling-education-employment linkage strengthened; more women in paid work Positive image of women that goes beyond emphasizing women in traditional roles	Family well being Increased child survival Lower fertility Higher age at marriage Lower rate of population growth Reduced family expenditure on health care
Health	Priority for Basic Health Services Remove regional disparities in provision of health services Ensure female trained medical staff in these health facilities Encourage training of traditional midwives/ healers Document/develop strategies to increase men's understanding of reproductive health/Family Planning Media campaigns including discussion on social/economic costs to families of MM/IM Invest on research on women's health problems	Better nutrition and health status More repro health problems identified and referred Reducing MM/IM	Lower child mortality Better child health Higher producti-vity, higher income
Livelihood/Work Participation Rates	Training and skill development - agriculture and livestock Education and vocational training - social sector, urban employment Credit facilities combined with skills training and marketing Securing women's property rights Child care facilities Improving statistics: training investigators and raising awareness on 'what is work'	Increased employ-ment opportunities for women Increased earnings, higher contribution to the GDP Better valuation of currently 'invisible' work, more appropri-ate resource allocation	Improved status of women within the household; better outcomes for children More competitive labor force National statistics begin to recognize and count women's economic contribution



Chapter-7

Conclusion



Conclusions

....(W)e have to engage in a societal dialogue to enhance the opportunities of women and improve cooperation between men and women on the basis of our culture, the experience of other Islamic countries, and the global norms of human rights.²³⁹

This Country Gender Assessment has analyzed some important facets of Afghan society that have a bearing on women's status and gender relations. It provides a situational analysis of gender in Afghanistan and addresses it in the context of different sectors - health, education, women's work and political participation. The report concludes that in each of these areas while culture is extremely important, and there are factors unique to Afghanistan to be taken into account in designing policy and understanding the social structure, there are nevertheless also large similarities between Afghanistan and other countries in the region. While Afghanistan's overall health and certainly reproductive health indicators are extremely poor, as are education indicators, its indicators of women's labor force participation are quite similar to the rest of the region. Even in health indicators, Afghanistan perhaps faces the same problems in infant mortality as do certain poorest regions of India and Pakistan. Afghanistan's policy framework, its implementation structures and institutions and basic infrastructure have all been near-devastated by years of political turmoil, which seems to form the overwhelming cause for these poor indicators. Thus, it is issues related to the conflict, including the present poor security situation, that are in large part responsible for low gender-related outcomes, rather than something intrinsic to the Afghan

²³⁹ *National Development Framework, 2002, p.13*

culture. After emerging from a serious conflict situation, Bangladesh's indicators also were extremely poor, but with a major national effort they are now among the best in the region.

What this also implies is that while the policy interventions and the technical solutions are quite generic - in terms for provision of health and education, training, skills and employment - **how** these should be provided has to be specific to the Afghan context. Unless **existing institutions and processes are used as the basis for implementation**, such initiatives will not succeed. Moreover, it is important to put in place trained national staff who will implement these interventions. For instance, to enable Afghan women to work in rural areas, certain practical arrangements have to be considered to facilitate their mobility.

The **strategic lesson** to be learned from the experiences of different agencies, and confirmed through Afghan history, is that the definition of gender roles is so central in Afghan society and culture that **any perceived or planned changes require consultations, not only with the individual household but rather with the larger local community**. Men and women to a large extent share the same cultural ethos and values, including their conception of gender roles, and they seek to validate these within their local communities. Years of turmoil have furthermore left local communities to their own devices, strengthening the inherent distrust of external authorities and increased reliance upon conservative values. The remarkable **social cohesion**, which has brought the Afghan population through the years of turmoil with fewer scars than could be expected, also **includes strict social norms and control of conformity** with these norms. Hence, any perceived attempts to induce change require solid **consultation with and consent** among the affected communities.

The examples of **community consultations finding local solutions to service delivery** illustrate that to conduct successful programs targeting women, it is necessary not only to address women but men as well. A parallel is found in the stress on **mediation at the local level** with *shuras* and elders, which has proven valuable to find **peaceful solutions to serious domestic conflicts** over forced marriage, elopement and other highly sensitive gender issues. This indicates that even though gender discrimination is pervasive in Afghanistan, it is possible through local-level institutions and initiatives to improve the situation and not rely primarily on interventions from a coercive state, which carry the inherent risk of stimulating a backlash.

A second important conclusion which emerges from this analysis is regarding **heterogeneity** - regional, urban/rural, in geographical terrains, ethnicities and structures of the economy.

These factors are of prime importance and need to be taken fully into account while designing and delivering policy interventions. Thus, there are areas like Badakhshan where women's status is relatively higher and mobility relatively less restricted, but public infrastructure is extremely poor. Such areas present a **great opportunity for quick gains** in women's status. Urban areas have better infrastructure, but access may be limited due to a number of reasons. Areas bordering Iran may have had better access to information for women and thus made them more receptive to new ideas, while inland areas may be less so. As a starting point a more in-depth analysis at the sub-national level needs to be undertaken so that **policy can address these heterogeneities** within the country, rather than employ a generic approach.

Third, the relative roles of women and men in Afghanistan rest on a **notion of complementarity** rather than equality in the western sense. A recent nation-wide Public Opinion Poll revealed that there is a consensus between men and women in Afghanistan on the biggest problems facing women, despite the fact that many of these same problems involve the role of men. The responses of both sexes on every item regarding the status of women were similar.²⁴⁰ Both men and women interviewed selected 'lack of education and literacy' (47%), 'women's rights' (33%) and 'health care' (32%) as the greatest problems confronting Afghan women today. These **shared perceptions across gender lines** and the importance of public opinion in matters relating especially to women, on whom a family's honor and reputation depends, makes it imperative to adopt not only a **community-based approach but also a true gender approach** (as opposed to a 'women' approach). Adjustments in men's and women's roles must clearly involve negotiations among both parties in order to be successful.

A related aspect is the role of the community in providing women with better access to services and information. Afghanistan is less an individualistic and more a communitarian society. Thus community backing for reform is essential in all areas, and in the arena of gender relations it is most imperative. Policy interventions and delivery of new programs should therefore involve not only husbands and families, but entire communities and their elders as well as broader groups in the traditional society. Thus whether in parent-teacher associations, mediation groups such as shuras and jirgas, micro-credit groups, or for access to basic health and education facilities, the involvement of the community is of critical importance. The formation of Community Development Committees under the NSP has created a new forum for involvement of the community, which furthermore holds considerable potential for increased local governance.

²⁴⁰ *Voter Education Planning Survey: Afghanistan 2004 National Elections*. A report based on a public opinion poll. July 2004

Finally, this analysis recognizes the role of NGO contribution in providing women with access to information and services. NGOs have worked even during the Taliban reign and have a deep understanding of the opportunities and constraints in moving forward with the agenda of women's advancement. While scaling up NGO interventions is often not easy, yet, their experiences should provide guidance to future interventions, the national staff trained by them can be used as trainers for others.

The report suggests that under the prevailing social, economic and political conditions, the main areas of intervention in support of gender equity and gender mainstreaming should be:

- ✓ substantial strengthening of **women's employment in the health and education sectors**, which will have direct positive effects on girls' school enrollment, women's access to health services, maternal mortality and general child and family health
- ✓ strengthening **women's involvement in agricultural and livestock production** in the form of extension and training, credit facilities and expanding marketing opportunities
- ✓ development of **socially acceptable skilled and unskilled employment opportunities for women in the urban sector** in response to the high level of poor female-headed households
- ✓ **legal reforms to remove gender inequities** within Family Law, in terms of marriage, marriage age, divorce and inheritance
- ✓ collection of **adequate sex-disaggregated data across all sectors** to document women's and men's involvement and to enable monitoring of future developments and effects of investments

These interventions call for a series of actions, including creation of an appropriate institutional framework to support women's training, market linkages, access to credit and child care facilities, schooling infrastructure including incentives designed to reduce the drop out rate for girls, and maternal health care facilities to be spread out into remote rural areas. Given the current state of data in and about Afghanistan and the limited experience with a variety of actions, it is not possible to quantify precisely the impact of these actions. However, on the basis of other countries' experience, not only would the **well-being of women, men and children improve** as a result, but that this will also have **positive growth outcomes from a country perspective**. While it is difficult to quantify the benefits precisely, given the current magnitude of gender disparities it is certainly the case that at the margin the direct and indirect benefits of policy actions to address these priority areas are much greater than the costs.



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