

Achieving gender equality in Afghanistan

Spotlight report on SDG 4 & 5

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Afghanistan is a country that has shown tremendous resilience in the face of ongoing conflict and insurgency in its territory for the last couple of decades. The country worked hard to improve its gender and social development indicators after the end of the Taliban's rule in 2002, despite the financial and political instability, and ever looming fear of insurgents occupying the country back.

Since 2015, after promising to work on Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) targets, the country showed a significant will to restructure its government functions and ensure an inclusive process to lead the country on the roadmap to SDGs 2030.

SDG 4 and 5 - focusing on quality education and gender equality - were of utmost importance since both suffered the worst rollbacks under the Taliban regime of 1996-2001. The country made significant progress after their rule - improving the girls enrolment 10x since 2002¹ and having women's participation in all aspects of political, economic and social domains. The gender gap, despite being still significant, was narrowing in all aspects of lives.

With the return to Taliban rule once again, we see all the hard earned gains on girls' education and gender sliding over the last two decades seemingly undone overnight. Girls' education is once again banned at the secondary level, women are not allowed to work and public life for women has ceased to exist.

In the new context, this document looks at how the series of repressive laws announced by the Taliban regime have made life more difficult and challenging for women and girls and how it has impacted on all the progress the country had made on various targets under SDG 4 and 5.

The Taliban needs to reopen all the on an immediate basis and should ensure that all girls are allowed to pursue education in a safe and secure environment.

The international community needs to ensure support by mobilising and managing funds to keep the education department running and keeping the school functional. Urgent funds are required to disburse salaries especially of female teachers and to pay for basic operational expenses required to run schools.

The international community also needs to monitor closely on any changes in the curriculum ensuring that education in schools is not used by Taliban to radicalise young minds and becomes a means to transmit their patriarchal ideologies and beliefs.

Lastly, there is an utmost need for much coordinated and concerted efforts to be led by international and local civil society to counter Taliban's repression and to bring women and girls' voices front and centre to the discussion and dialogue on Afghanistan.



PROLOGUE

Afghanistan submitted its last Volunteer National Review (VNR) report in June 2021, just two months before the country witnessed a massive political shift resulting in the collapse of all political and administrative institutions of the country. The roadmap to Agenda 2030, as what was conceived in 2015 and was being implemented before the regime change, not only now stands to a complete halt but is now regressing back in the last 10 months since the takeover by the Taliban.

The then Minister of the Economy, Dr Karima Hamid Faryadi, a strong female leader in the country, in her opening statement of the VNR report acknowledged the small but significant progress the country was making on the SDGs, despite various challenges posed by the pandemic and the security conflict.² Little did she or the world know that in the next two months Afghanistan would find itself in a situation where no women would be allowed to work or study, let alone hold a political or ministerial portfolio.

The current Taliban regime has had a massive setback on the progress on all the SDGs, especially to girls' right to education (SDG 4) and gender empowerment and equality (SDG 5). Secondary schools for adolescent girls are all closed on the false pretext of religion and culture and a series of 12 repressive laws are making lives of women and girls more difficult and limited to the confines of their homes only.

This document is an attempt to showcase 1) how a country tried to build itself back since 2001-2002 - after the end of the first Taliban rule - even under the context of deep political instability, countrywide protracted conflict and insurgency, and 2) what progress towards SDG 4 and 5 really mean in the new context. It will also set out how peace, political stability and basic human rights are a prerequisite to the conversation on SDG, especially now that the country has found itself back under the rule of Taliban once again.



THE PROGRESS ON SDGS UNTIL AUGUST 2021

A national priority and the framework

In 2015 Afghanistan was among the first 193 countries that pledged to adopt the SDGs agenda and appointed the Ministry of Economy (MoEc) to lead the coordination, implementation and monitoring of the progress.³ Through the help of the United National Development Programme (UNDP), it was rolled out in a phased manner, focusing on nationalisation, alignment and implementation.

It's important to note that the continued political instability and conflict made the implementation of the SDGs challenging. The process of nationalisation and alignment, contrary to what was conceived originally, was highly centralised in planning and execution and lacked input in real sense from the larger civil society, academia and other social institutions and individuals. Nevertheless, the roadmap and the implementation achieved incremental progress which was evident through various SDGs.

The alignment process was generally weak on gender. The report 'Aligning National Priority Programs (NPPs) with Afghanistan Sustainable Development Goals (ASDGs)' found that apart from the NPP on Women Economic Empowerment, none of the other 10 priority programmes took into account the significant gender disparities and were therefore not designed to be gender transformative for women and girls.⁴

Despite the challenges, there were still a few notable successes contributing to women's empowerment, such as the recruitment of 2500 female teachers, training of the midwives and nurses in the most marginalised and underserved areas, and saw the close coordination between the Ministry of Women Affairs (MoWA) and Ministry of Labour.

In the Nationalisation phase (2016-18), the ministry established 4 working groups on Security and Governance; Agriculture and Rural Development; Education, Health and Social Protection; and Infrastructure and Economy. It also developed main SDG goals and framework and established important coordination and implementation structures within the government, CSOs and working groups at different administrative levels.





SDG 4: Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education promote lifelong learning opportunities for all

Building back girls' participation in education

Over the last 20 years Afghanistan has made promising strides on girls' education. Growing public demand, local advocacy by women's rights activists and civility society groups and increased government investment in education have enabled millions of girls and women to go to school and realise their ambitions for the future. The Afghan government enshrined within the Constitution a mandated education for every child up to ninth grade (lower secondary school, ages 13–15).⁵

The country saw an epic 10 fold increase in the enrolment of both boys and girls from around 1 million children in schools in 2001 and to almost 10 million in 2018.⁶ More than 3.6 million girls were enrolled by 2018 – more than 2.5 million in primary school and over 1 million in secondary. The increase in girls in secondary education was particularly marked, with nearly 40% enrolled in 2018 compared with 6% in 2003.⁷

Primary school: 773,000 to 6.5 million

Lower secondary: 202,000 to 2 million

Upper secondary: 160,000 to 1 million

Higher education: 26,000 to 0.4 million

UNESCO 2021

Despite the impressive progress in access nationally, high dropout rates were particularly acute in certain provinces, like Paktika, and nationally among girls between primary and secondary school.⁸ Government statistics from 2017 indicate that in some provinces, the percentage of students who were girls was as low as 15%.⁹

Given that adolescent girls are predominantly taught by female teachers, one critical factor impacting their access to education is the supply of female teachers in girls schools and the quality of teaching. The share of qualified teachers increased especially at the higher levels of education. The number of teachers increased

by 58% from 2007 to 2018, rising from 143,000 to 226,000.¹⁰ The increment of female teachers during the same period is 105%, much higher than that for the total number of teachers. However, we need to ensure that the female teachers are distributed equitably, especially in districts where females constitute only 10% or less of the total teacher population.

	Female %	Female number	Men number	Total
Province	Source: Afghanistan Yearbook Statistical			
	2017-2018			
Country average	35%	64,652	118,401	183,053
Kabul	68%	20,177	9526	29,703
Provinces with less than 10% female teachers				
1 Paktika	1%	44	2899	2943
2 Khost	4%	178	3936	3472
3 Maidan Wardak	6%	251	3826	4087
4 Kunarha	7%	224	3221	3445
5 Paktya	7%	234	3238	3472
6 Laghman	8%	302	3544	3846
7 Zabul	9%	75	781	856
8 Urozgen	9%	132	1299	1431
Average	6.3%	1440	22,744	23,552
Provinces with > 10% but less than 20% female teachers				
9 Ghor	11%	438	3553	3991
10 Nangarhar	11%	1474	11,387	12,861
11 Nooristan	13%	148	983	1131
12 Logar	14%	430	2536	2966
13 Parwan	17%	921	4564	5485
14 Helmand	19%	462	1988	2450
15 Kapisa	19%	565	2378	2943
Average	14.9%	4438	27,389	31,827

Adolescent girls – especially those from lower-income, rural provinces and those belonging to minority ethnic groups or living with disabilities – faced discriminatory practices like female seclusion and early marriage which impeded school attendance.¹¹ COVID-19, recurrent droughts and sociopolitical insecurity have increased pressure on both the education system and households, exacerbating many of the barriers girls face.^{12 13}

School life expectancy

Within the same span of time - 2000-2019 - Afghanistan's mean years of schooling increased by 1.7 years and expected years of schooling increased by 4.3 years.¹⁴ The improvement was more significant among girls and women from near-zero in 2000 to 7.7 years in 2019. School life expectancy varied by location and was much higher for urban students than for rural population.¹⁵ For every ten students who started in grade one, eight made it to the end of grade six and less than three made it to the end of grade 12.¹⁶

Efforts to improve education quality

Despite the progress on improving access to education over the past two decades, Afghanistan's education system faced many challenges particularly in regards to the quality of education. Girls' secondary schools have been historically under-resourced, lacking in quality learning material and poor physical infrastructure, limiting students' access to water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) facilities.¹⁷

Two large scale assessments measuring minimum proficiency in reading and mathematics by gender showed incremental progress in the learning levels, but were still far off in comparison to the countries in south and west Asia.¹⁸ While female literacy has increased dramatically between 2011 and 2018 - from 17% to 30% - it remains comparably low.¹⁹ UNICEF and UNESCO found that 93% of children finish primary school without gaining basic literacy skills.²⁰

SDG 5: Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls

Progress on the elimination of violence against women

Afghanistan since the end of the Taliban occupation in 2002, have ratified and enacted various laws to provide protections to women and girls from violence. In 2003, it ratified the convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and in 2009, Afghanistan adopted the Elimination of Violence against Women Law (EVAW) by Presidential Decree²¹ - both of which were instrumental to changes in the political and economic landscape including promoting women's political participation.

The Law referenced "fighting against customs, traditions and practices which contradict Islamic Sharia and cause violence against women", and was aligned with recognized international treaties to which the Afghanistan is a signatory.²²

The Law was lauded for dramatically expanding the list of abuses against women that constituted criminal offenses, including forced marriage, under-age marriage, and rape. The law marked a high point after

years of struggle by women's rights activists who had helped shape the law and advocated for its passage.

Both the laws were instrumental in enforcing police duty towards any incoming complaints of abuse, violence, harassment and also required them to report incidents and progress to the now defunct Ministry of Women Affairs.²³

To further support implementation of the law and address impunity, the 'Special Violence against Women Unit' of the Attorney General's Office was established in March 2010, with a mandate to investigate and prosecute cases of violence against women and assist victims throughout the process.

However, despite the strong legal framework in place, the incidence of violence against women still remain high in Afghanistan. Reports on violence against women concluded that almost 90% of women experienced at least one form of interpersonal violence and 90% of Afghan adults, including women, believed that wife beating was justified under some conditions.²⁴



The proportion of seats held by women in the national parliament and managerial positions

Before the Taliban occupation, the Afghanistan government took concrete measures to ensure effective participation and leadership opportunities in the Cabinet by approving to designate one deputy governor position for each province to women. In terms of the proportion of legislative seats held by women, Afghan women made up 25% of the lower house of Parliament and 15% of the Senate.²⁵ This number was only 4% in the 1990s.²⁶ In 2019 Zarifa Ghafari became the first female mayor of Afghanistan for Maidan Shahr, capital city of the Wardak Province.²⁷ Though the representation was still significantly less than men, the trajectory was in the right direction and Afghanistan benefited from having women voices in the legislative and policy matters of the country.

There were efforts by the government at the time to strengthen the Afghan women economic empowerment through focusing on increasing gender related statistics, removing legal barriers to women's participation in economic activities, and ensuring access to finance, technologies, and market, through a revised version of Women Economic Empowerment NPP.

The policies enabled women to actively be part of the economy, where around 30% of women were part of the civil services and a close to 4% of the women were in managerial positions in the private sector.²⁸

Investments in technology and communication to promote empowerment of women

Afghanistan had made a lot of strides in ensuring increasing access to the internet and communication tools to its citizens, especially to the women. It implemented several digital government projects, including Digital CASA (Central Asia South Asia), which aimed to increase access to more affordable Internet in Afghanistan. The other projects that had a significant impact on women's lives were the E-AFGHANISTAN National Priority Program proposal, and the National Cyber Security Strategy of Afghanistan (NCSA).²⁹

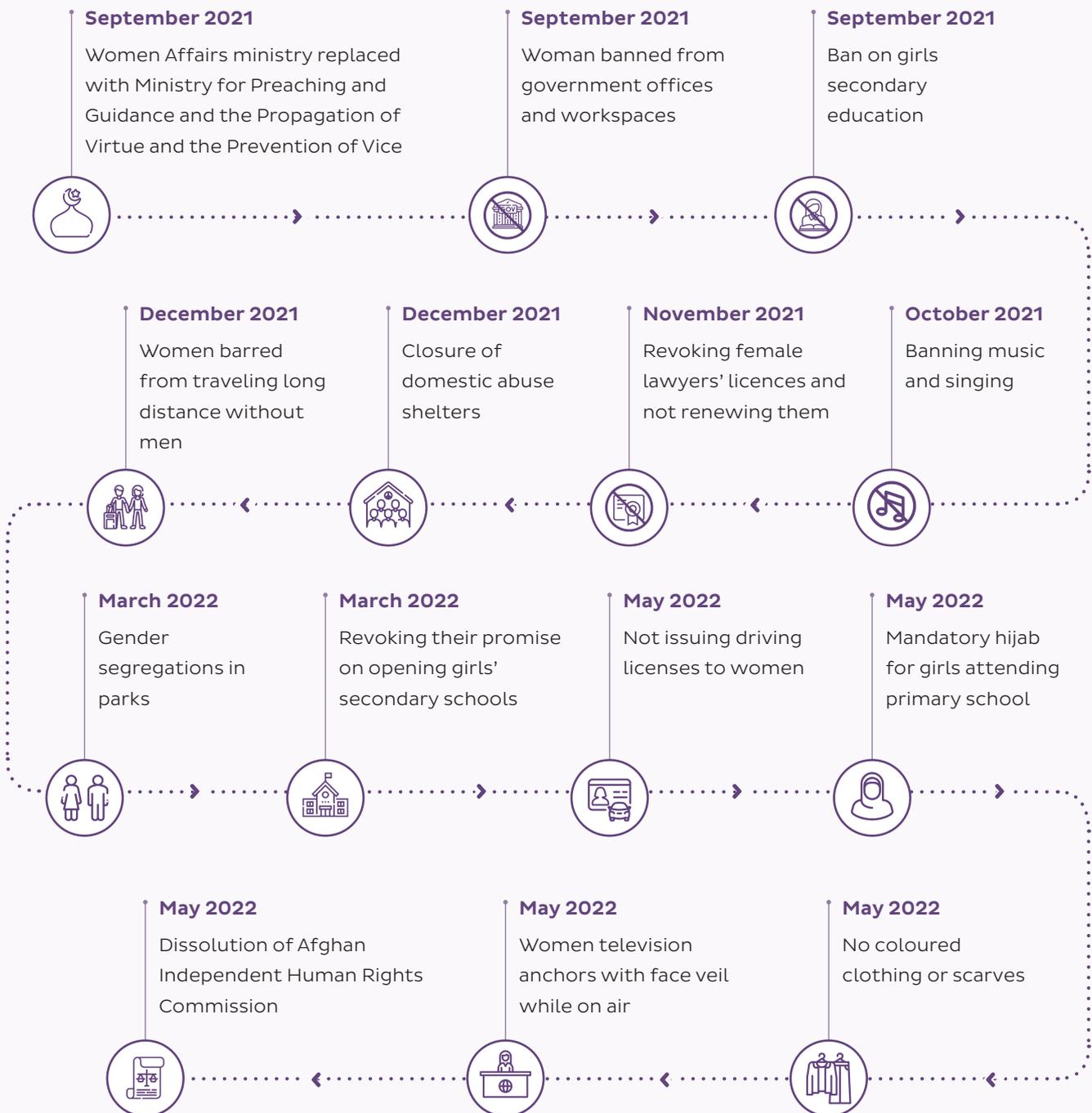
In January 2021, the very first Information session of EQUALS Global Partnership was hosted by the Afghanistan Telecommunication Regulatory Authority (ATRA) and ITU with the aim of again to bridge Afghanistan's gender digital divide.

We also saw a local Afghan girls robotic team coming from the Herat region, competing in the international platforms and winning not just prizes for the country, but also inspiring millions of girls in the country to dream big for their future.



A TIMELINE OF REPRESSION: THE RETURN OF THE TALIBAN

Since August 2021, the Taliban regime has acted and issued decrees to repress women rights and freedoms in Afghanistan. The new laws and regulations are stifling women's ability to step out of their homes, let alone pursue their education and professional careers. These laws are having a severe impact on the mental health of women and girls and are also affecting the long term prospects of Afghanistan becoming a peaceful and prosperous country.





THE IMPACT OF BANS AND REPRESSIVE LAWS ON THE ACHIEVEMENT OF THE SDGS

SDG 4: Quality Education



A promise for free, equitable and quality primary and secondary education for all

After the Taliban came to power in August 2021, the first of the many bans they announced was on education, ordering schools to be closed immediately for both boys and girls. The former opened in a matter of a few days, but the Taliban said girls' schools remain closed on the pretext of 'making schools safe for girls'.³⁰

Despite the Taliban's clampdown on girls' education, popular sentiment for girls' education remains. Local community and activists demand, alongside pressure from NGOs and governments, for which public education in Afghanistan for both boys and girls has been a major requirement for resuming financial and material assistance to Afghanistan, the Taliban have ordered opening of primary schools for girls between the grade 1 and 6. This concession, which was not allowed under the first Taliban regime, does come with strict adherence to the new dress code. Girls, in few of the secondary schools that are open in few provinces like Balkh, are required to cover themselves from toe to head with loose clothes and complete veil. This is specially enforced through parents, especially fathers out of fear of being reprimanded for any violations. Any breach in the dress code has resulted in punishment and also in some cases termination of teachers from the school.³¹

Secondary schools for girls, however, remain shut. This de facto ban has nearly doubled the number of girls out of school at the secondary level³² and has cost Afghan girls more than 350million days of learning to date.³³ Without the prospect of an education, more than 1 million adolescent girls are limited to the confines of their homes.³⁴ The closure of schools for more than 280 days has further intensified the learning gap between boys and girls, putting girls at a severe disadvantage to pursue higher education and live their dreams. Even

though there are women currently studying in few universities in Afghanistan, soon because of the closure of the secondary schools in the country, we won't see many female students progressing to universities/colleges.

The education for the same girls had only started again after the pandemic induced long closure of the schools. The former government, with the support of the international community, had introduced remedial measures to overcome the learning losses of students. However, the current situation now further regresses the learning levels of girls and slims their prospects of continuing their education even if girls' secondary schools reopen in Afghanistan in the near future.

Eliminate gender disparities in education and ensure equal access to all levels of education

The ban on secondary girls' education has already intensified the disparity between girls and boys in terms of the enrolment, learning levels and completion of education.

The girls in Afghanistan never had the ideal environment and circumstances to pursue their education. Despite all the odds, they pushed themselves each day to live their dreams. The current ban on education has rendered them completely helpless and many of the girls will now never get the opportunity to go back to school, even if it opens, because of the increased domestic responsibilities and for getting married at an early age.

There are no alternative modes of education also available at mass scale in Afghanistan, in terms of digital learning, that the girls can use for learning during the ban. This will result in increasing the learning divide between girls and boys, affecting the future gender ratios in higher education, occupational roles, and in overall social and political structures of the country.

Ensure that all learners acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development

Education as a means to empower girls to make their own life choices seems a far reality in the current context of Afghanistan where the girls are not even allowed to go to secondary schools.

These girls have been going through one crisis after another, from a months-long school closure because of the pandemic and the onslaught of repressive restrictions on education by Taliban.

This is having a massive impact on the learning levels of children, especially the girls who have no other means to continue their education. It is unknown when the schools will reopen. The more worrying part is if they reopen, what will be taught in these schools. The previous incidence of Taliban's occupation of Kunduz, Paktia and Nangarhar provinces in 2014 resulted in banning secular curriculum and making it more religious. It dropped subjects like English, Culture, History and Physical Education.³⁵ It is being suggested that the schools curriculum and textbooks will undergo a massive change, with high incidence of Islamic reference and teachings in the subjects of social sciences, physical sciences etc, removal of any reference of women leaders, and designing education as a means to radicalise the future generations.

In this context, it is hard to determine the learning loss of girls and what kind of remedial programmes would

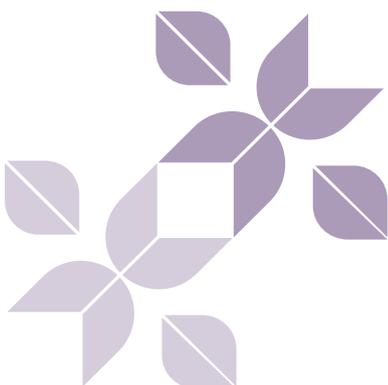
be needed to address it. The then Government in early 2021 did come up with a revised iteration of their Human Capital NPP which tried to mitigate the learning losses among children because of the pandemic and aimed at investing in the education and skills of the generation to drive the country out of the political and security turmoil. However, those initiatives never saw the light of the day with the Taliban takeover.

The supply of quality female teachers

One of the major predicaments Afghanistan is going through is the supply of female teachers for girls' schools. The Taliban have made opening of girls' schools conditional on many factors, among which one is the availability of only female teachers. However, in the same line the new edicts and decree passed each day by Taliban is making it very difficult for women to resume their educational and professional careers.

The lack of funds and the disbursement of timely salaries is making it more difficult for women to sustain their careers, where they are being pushed to take care of domestic responsibilities.

The new repressive laws by the Taliban are making it very difficult for the female teachers to resume their professional duties. There have been incidents of harassment and threats towards female teachers to not only ensure their own hijab but to also be held responsible for any girls in their school who violate the dress code.





SDG 5: Gender Equality



Eliminate all forms of violence against all women and girls

Afghanistan ranked 170th out of 189 on the Global Gender Development Index in 2019. This index should however, be read in its context. This is a country that stemmed out of the Taliban's highly repressive regime against women. Since then, Afghanistan has worked its way in introducing several laws, policies, national strategies, action plans, and programmes that were enacted in the span of 20 years to safeguard and advance women's rights. The implementation of those varied in different parts of the country based on the government's writ and control of its territories.

Unfortunately, we see the country slide back to what it had witnessed under the Taliban regime of the 90s. While previously the EVAW Law provided crucial support for Afghan women, under the current regime there is no similar law or court. The lack of a provision to prosecute crimes committed against women has created an environment of impunity for the perpetrators, making violence normal and acceptable.

The high censorship of media, the clamping down of civil society, all gives greater strength to the patriarchy and men to repress women by force. Therefore, the women are doubly victimised by falling victim to gender based violence and then by the communities which fault women for violating patriarchal codes of conduct.

There have been recent incidence of kidnapping and rape on the pretext of capturing women violating the public code of life. These incidents are rarely captured by the Western media because of the high censorship. In the recent incident in Mazar e Sharif in January 2022, Taliban captured 40 women and raped eight of those women. Some of them who were later released were then killed by their own family members for violating the honour code. Some women are still not released just because they cannot travel outside alone and the men of their family do not want to escort them back.³⁶

Legal retribution for the recent alleged gang rapes is unlikely, given that the Taliban have eliminated the women's affairs office, which worked to secure

women's legal rights. They replaced it with the previously disbanded ministry of vice and virtue.

It has also been reported by Amnesty International that the Taliban has closed women's shelters and other social services for women experiencing abuse.³⁷

Eliminate all harmful practices

In November 2021, the then Executive Director of UNICEF, Henrietta Fore in one of her statement said:

“I am deeply concerned by reports that child marriage in Afghanistan is on the rise. We have received credible reports of families offering daughters as young as 20 days old up for future marriage in return for a dowry.”

UNICEF estimates that 28% of Afghan women marry before the age of 18. This number is expected to rise dramatically despite the recent ban on forced marriage by the Taliban.³⁸

There is no current data on early marriages in Afghanistan, but one fears high incidence of child marriages again based on the figures from the previous Taliban regime in Afghanistan which was at 61.9% of all marriages were before the age of 18.³⁹

These early marriages in most of the cases are resulting in severe depression for girls as they have to go through life altering changes by moving into new homes, adjusting with new people and being given added domestic responsibilities at a very young age. For most of them the prospects of education and their dreams and aspirations just come to an abrupt end.

The COVID pandemic, the ongoing food crisis and now because of the recent Taliban occupation, the collapse of the economy and the ensuing poverty are all pushing families to make a desperate choice by putting children to work and marrying girls off at a young age.⁴⁰

The closure of the schools is also not helping this problem. Education is often the best protection against negative coping mechanisms such as child marriage and child labour.

Girls who marry before they turn 18 are less likely to remain in school and more likely to experience domestic violence, discrimination, abuse and poor mental health. They are also more vulnerable to complications in pregnancy and childbirth.⁴¹

Recognize and value unpaid care and domestic work

A UN Women report in 2021, suggested that women in Afghanistan spent approximately 11.4 hours per day doing unpaid domestic and care work compared to 2.8 hours by men. More than 70% of that went directly to housework. Based on the new National Household Survey of 2020, the labour force population rate in Afghanistan is at 41.9%, of which the male participation rate is 68.4% and just 16.5% for women. Therefore, the percentage of the working population outside of the labour force is estimated at 58.1%.

The pandemic in 2021 again saw a disproportionate impact on women's unpaid labour where the domestic responsibility for women shot up to 18.7 hours in a day, compared to just 5.6 hours for men.⁴²

As the nation never got time to recover from the pandemic and the entire country collapsed to Taliban's occupation once again, we can only imagine what impact the repressive women's laws under their regime has on the domestic unpaid labour on women.

A primary school teacher recalling the days when the previous regime restricted her to step outside the home without a male:

“They made announcements by loudspeaker that girls' schools should shut down, they announced that the best place for a woman is in the house or the grave. My school closed and we had to stop going to work. All the girls stayed at home. It was a dark time.”⁴³

What we know from earlier studies looking into the impact of Taliban's occupation of the 90s on women's lives in Afghanistan is that the major impact was on the women in urban centres for whom the lives were completely altered - with more restrictions on stepping out for work and leisure. The lives of women in the villages remained not much changed. In a survey in 2001 by Physicians for Human Rights of women heads of household suggested that around 82% of women associated themselves as homemakers being also involved in informal sectors to keep their families fed and alive.⁴⁴

Ensure women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making

Afghanistan with the in-security, conflict and insurgency in its different territories do not provide a level field for women to compete against men in education and professional workspaces. Despite that, we saw women reclaiming their space and rising in leadership positions, holding important political offices, managerial positions in private organisations and being active participants in the economy and growth of Afghanistan.

The current occupation by Taliban has zeroed all the progress and the struggle of the years that women had put in to reclaim their lives.

The women now do not hold any political office. They are barred from stepping outside of their homes without a mehram, rendering it very difficult for them to continue their professional careers. The parliament before August 2021 constituted 25% women representatives. Now the political setup does not have any woman representation.

The government machinery before the occupation consisted of an average 30% women in the civil services. Soon after the occupation in August 2021, Taliban had announced all the women to vacate their government jobs and sit at home.

The situation in 2022 in Afghanistan is looking more similar to what Afghanistan was under the same Taliban's occupation in 1996-2001. All the progress in the last 20 odd years that the women in Afghanistan made is slowly receding back to the dark days of the late 90s era.



RECOMMENDATIONS



Ensure the right to education for all is safeguarded for all children, youth and adults, regardless of their gender, ethnicity, location and religion. There are many international treaties and conventions that Afghanistan has ratified and is a signatory to, such as the Convention on Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), the Convention of the Rights of the Child (CRC) and the Safe School Declaration (SSD). It is important that the international community closely monitors the situation on the ground and puts pressure on the Taliban regime to adhere to these international conventions for any dialogue or recognition of their authority.



Provide all students, especially girls equitable access to learning opportunities. All local and international actors should act to ensure that girls are provided with learning opportunities at all levels of education. A local demand, with international support, needs to be strengthened to put pressure on the Taliban to open up secondary schools for girls and make their schools a safe space for learning.



Support female teachers by paying salaries in time and providing them a safe working environment. The international community - including UN agencies - need to provide the funding to the education office to disburse the salaries and to also ensure that female teachers go through professional training and development to upgrade their skills, especially in the subjects of mathematics and sciences.



Ensure curriculum is protected and is only modified to enhance the learning and skills for girls to compete in the modern world. The international community needs to ensure that it is not used as a tool to radicalise students to further Taliban's rule.



The international community needs to **push the Taliban to have an inclusive policy dialogue and education planning** to ensure gender issues are prioritised and the new education policy reflects the current economic, development and humanitarian crisis in the country.



UN agencies, World Bank and other donors focusing on Afghanistan need to **support the education department to strengthen their data regimes** for a better understanding of the issues and challenges on the ground and to effectively plan for policies and strategies for inclusive and equitable education.



The international community needs to invest in strengthening the local civil society to resist the repressive edicts and decrees issued by Taliban and to work against any harmful social norms that inhibit girls from completing their education.



Provide local youth, especially females, the opportunities and platforms that help amplify their voices and demands. Ensure that international summits, conferences and events have special quota for sessions dedicated to Afghanistan, providing local Afghans to speak their issues to the international community.



The international community to step up urgently in **holding the de facto authorities accountable for any violations of the local and international policies that protect women and girls from physical violence and harassment.**

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ENDNOTES

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