

Policy Brief

Women's Economic Situation in Afghanistan

The status of Afghan women is still generally regarded as one of the lowest in the world: according to the Human Development Report (2015) Afghanistan ranked 171 out of 188 countries in 2015 in terms of Human Development Index (HDI), which measures health, education and standard of living indicators.ⁱ This is reflected in the difference in workforce participation rates of females and males. According to Status of Women in Afghanistan Report published by Ministry of Women Affairs (MoWA) in December 2015 the female labor force participation rate is almost three times lower than that of men at 29.0% as opposed to 81.0% for men.ⁱⁱ As per the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission Report 1,098 cases of economic violence has occurred in 2015 which make 21.40% of total cases of violence against women in that year. This violence includes deprivation of women from receiving alimony, prohibition from right to work, denial of heritage as well as personal property and dowry.ⁱⁱⁱ

The factors known to contribute to economic poverty of women are often related to inadequate education and skills, limited access to capital and markets, cultural barriers, restrictions on freedom of mobility, physical security, and limited participation of women in governance, weak position of women in the informal economy, unequal wages especially in the agriculture sector, lack of transparency in recruitment of women, sexual harassment of women in workplace as well as child care and household responsibilities.

Considerable advances in women's human rights have been achieved in Afghanistan since 2001. These achievements include legislation, policies and plans which support women's rights, including:

- Ratification of the new Constitution of Afghanistan which, in article 48 states that "work is the right of every Afghan".^{iv}
- Endorsement of the Labor Code, which in article 9 (1) "prohibits discrimination in recruitment, payment of salaries and allowances to the staff, making a profession, the right to education and provision of the social protection".^v
- The draft of the National Action Plan for Women's Economic Empowerment in Afghanistan 1395-1399.
- Formulation of gender-sensitive strategies and plans such as the National Action Plan for the Women of Afghanistan (NAPWA) and Afghanistan National Development Strategy.
- Afghanistan has been a Member of the ILO since 1934 and has ratified a number of International Labour Conventions such as Abolition of Forced Labour Convention, Equal Remuneration Convention and Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Convention.
- Ratification of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.^{vi}
- GIROA's express commitment to observe the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.^{vii}

- Adoption of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

One of the important pieces of plan in regard to women rights and gender equality is the NAPWA. It is a policy framework with a ten-year (2007 - 2017) timeframe that aims to ensure continuity and consistency of the Government of Afghanistan's efforts to protect women citizenship rights in Afghan society. NAPWA pursues the twin goals of women's empowerment and gender equality.

NAPWA comprises three pillars: security; governance, rule of law and human rights; and economic and social development that includes economy, work and poverty, and health and education. Under the economy, work and poverty section, NAPWA aims to create an enabling economic and social environment that is conducive to the full development and realization of women's economic potential.

Signing the MDGs by the Government of Afghanistan in March 2004 with the target of fulfilling them by 2020 is another key step for eradicating poverty and achieving decent employment for women. The MDGs are the world's time-bound and quantified targets for addressing extreme poverty in its many dimensions-income poverty, hunger, disease, lack of adequate shelter, and exclusion-while promoting gender equality, education, and environmental sustainability. MDGs have eight development goals and its first goal is eradicating extreme poverty and hunger. When signing the MDGs, Afghanistan added a ninth, country-tailored development goal on the security situation.

Despite major achievements in the last decade, the women's economic situation is still miserable and they are very much economically dependent to men especially in rural areas which cause violence against them.^{viii} Women often contribute to household economy, through agriculture, livestock management, handicrafts, involvement in small and medium enterprises and civil service, but their contributions are either completely non-monetized, hugely underpaid (in the agriculture sector) or undervalued. The products and handicrafts of women do not receive enough support in terms of marketing, export and protection against foreign goods and products. Many women who earn an income are not permitted to control their earnings. Still most of women cannot exercise their right to work and are deprived of their heritage and property rights. The situation is even worse for widowed women and according to MoLSAMD 500,000 widowed women live across the country.^{ix} According to MoWA's research report 42.0% of active female population is unemployed which has risen from 34.2% in 2008.^x

According to MoWA, women's share in the non-agricultural sector is only 10.3% in 2015, a slight increase from 8.0% in the 2007. In urban areas very few women, 5.3%, are engaged in economic activities outside of their households.^{xi} Moreover, huge disparity exists among men and women in civil service. As per the Central Statistics Organization from among a total of 400,812 civil servants in 1394 (2015-2016) only 21.9% are

female and the remaining 78.1% are male.^{xii} And only 16 % of company's owners are women, however the remaining 84% are men.^{xiii}

In Addition, women have limited access to finance than men, not have the required collateral to secure loans and full control of or decision-making power over their own financial resources. They also face restricted mobility, experience exclusion from existing business and social networks and lack the necessary business and project management, marketing and accounting skills (and education more generally) as well as confidence to succeed, either as business owners or employees.^{xiv}

In light of the challenges and inequitable access of girls to work and economic rights, the following set of recommendations is submitted for consideration by Women Economic Empowerment Coalition:

- With the support of community and religious leaders organize advocacy campaigns for elimination of cultural barriers against women's economic rights such as deprivation from receiving alimony, denial of ownership of heritage, personal property and dowry as well as undervaluing the importance of women's work in the light of Islamic principles and national laws;
- In partnership with advocacy allies such as CSOs, women activists and media, organize awareness-raising campaigns on the Constitution of Afghanistan, specifically Articles 22, 24, and 48 and the Labor Code particularly articles 9, 31, 120, 122, 123 and 125, Civil Code (the heritage section) and Regulation on Prohibition of Women Harassment;
- Advocate with MoE for improving access, quality and management of technical and vocational education and trainings especially for women in rural areas;
- Advocate in government and non-governmental organizations to strictly apply and monitor the Labor Code specifically the articles mentioned above, the Regulation on Prohibition of Women Harassment and pay positive discrimination for recruitment of female candidates;
- Lobby in government ministries to establish women-only business streets and apply protectionist measures for women in the small and medium enterprise industry to nurture and sustain their initial growth and development;
- Lobby in national and international private sectors to create and institutionalize the business and economic knowledge of women and invest in the productive sectors, in a gender-informed manner, by transferring appropriate technology to women and by providing credit and capital at concessional terms to women producers and entrepreneur groups;
- Advocate in Specialized Family Court, Special Prosecution Office for Elimination of Violence against Woman and Special Court for Elimination of Violence against Women to strictly apply the Civil Code especially the section related to women's right to heritage;

- Lobby in government ministries to help business women connect to the market (internal and external) so that women can find better markets for their handicrafts and products;
- Advocate in MoLSAMD and MoWA to effectively follow-up the application of National Action Plan for Women’s Economic Empowerment in Afghanistan (1395-1399);
- Lobby and advocate with government ministries for the implementation of the National Action Plan for the Women of Afghanistan specifically pillar 3, which deals with economic and social development.

ⁱ United Nations Development Programme, *Human Development Report*, 2015

ⁱⁱ Ministry of Women’s Affairs, *Status of Women in Afghanistan*, 2015

ⁱⁱⁱ Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission, *Women and the Long Way for Access to Justice*, available at: http://www.aihrc.org.af/home/research_report/5393

^{iv} Constitution of Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, art. 48, 818 [series], 2004, available at: http://moj.gov.af/content/files/Pages/OfficialGazetteIndex_D-header.htm

^v Labor Code of Afghansitan, art. 9 (1), 966 [series], 2008, available at: http://moj.gov.af/content/files/Pages/OfficialGazetteIndex_D-header.htm

^{vi} Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission, available at: <http://www.aihrc.org.af/home/document/747>

^{vii} Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission, available at: <http://www.aihrc.org.af/home/document/736>

^{viii} Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission, *The Situation of Economic and Social Rights in Afghanistan*, Seventh Report, (1391-1392)

^{ix} BBC, Afghan Women, Success and Challenges, June 2015, available at: http://www.bbc.com/persian/afghanistan/2015/06/150623_k05_afghanistan_widows

^x Ministry of Women’s Affairs, *Status of Women in Afghanistan*, 2015

^{xi} Ministry of Women’s Affairs, *Status of Women in Afghanistan*, 2015

^{xii} Central Statistics Organizations, *Civil Service Employment Abstract*, available at: <http://cso.gov.af/en/page/1500/4722/2015-2016>

^{xiii} Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission, *The Situation of Economic and Social Rights in Afghanistan*, Seventh Report, (1391-1392)

^{xiv} Building Markets, *Afghan’s Women Economic Participation*, 2013