

## Policy Brief

### Women Access to Education in Afghanistan

Three decades of conflict devastated Afghanistan's education systems and institutions. Despite considerable progress over the past ten years in terms of access to education, girls continue to suffer disadvantage and disparity in educational opportunities in Afghanistan. According to the Afghanistan National Education for All (EFA) Review Report published in 2015, the share of the Afghan population, 25 years and older, that has completed any level of formal education is less than 7 %, and for women as few as 3 %. Moreover, 3.3 million children are still out of school. The literacy rate of women is less than one-third of that of men, and it is consistently low across all provinces except Kabul, where it is just above 40%. The male youth literacy rate is still more than double the female youth literacy rate.<sup>i</sup> According to UNICEF, girls' enrolment in 2015 was 38.3% and the number of female instructors was 32.3% in that year. Similarly, the ratio of girls to boys in primary education was 0.67 in 2014, meaning that only 67 girls made it to primary education for every 100 boys. During the same year, the ratios of girls to boys in secondary and tertiary education were 0.54 and 0.39, respectively.<sup>ii</sup>

The most important reasons for girls not to attend education includes unwillingness of the family to send girls to school, early marriage, lack of female teachers, less number of qualified teachers, poverty, child labor, insecurity, the long walking distance to school and harassment of children on their way to school or home and lack of school and proper infrastructure and necessary facilities such as toilets, drinking water and surrounding walls.

Considerable advances in girls' access to education have also been achieved in Afghanistan since 2002. Enrolment in primary and secondary education combined has increased, from around 900,000 children – almost all boys – in 2001 to more than 8.9 million in 2014, of which 39% were girls.<sup>iii</sup> These achievements include legislation, policies and plans in support of women's rights, including:

- Ratification of the new Constitution of Afghanistan which, in article 43 "guarantees the right to education to all citizens of Afghanistan and offers it free of charge up to bachelor's level in the state education institutes. It also emphasizes on expansion of balanced education as well as provision of mandatory intermediate education throughout Afghanistan".<sup>iv</sup>
- Endorsement of the education law, which in article three "emphasizes on equal rights to education of Afghan citizens without any kind of discrimination".<sup>v</sup>
- The draft of Afghanistan Third National Education Strategic Plan (NESP III) for 2017 – 2021.<sup>vi</sup>
- Formulation of gender-sensitive strategies and plans such as the National Action Plan for the Women of Afghanistan (NAPWA) and Afghanistan National Development Strategy.
- Ratification of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights<sup>vii</sup> and Convention on the Rights of the Child.<sup>viii</sup>
- GIRoA's express commitment to observe the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.<sup>ix</sup>

- Adoption of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

One of the most important plans with regard to education is the draft of Afghanistan Third National Education Strategic Plan (NESP III), which aims to establish a new framework for the realization of national social and economic priorities and to focus the education system on efficient delivery of results, better opportunities for children and youth, and more relevant education for Afghanistan's people. The key focus areas are quality and relevance of learning, enrolment of school age children, particularly girls into education, streamlining of Ministry operations and functions, greatly improving the efficiency and harmonization of donor funding and program management.<sup>x</sup>

Signing the MDGs by the Government of Afghanistan in March 2004 with the target of fulfilling them by 2020 is another key step for promoting education and gender equality. 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 second goal is achieving universal primary education. When signing the MDGs, Afghanistan added a ninth, country-tailored development goal on the security situation.

Similarly, NAPWA is another significant plan with regard to women empowerment. 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 education section, NAPWA aims to increase the enrolment and retention of girls and women at all levels of education, including vocational and non-formal education, and to create an enabling environment where girls and women have equal access to all levels of education, equal treatment in the classroom and equal opportunity to complete the highest possible level and quality of education within the appropriate time period.<sup>xi</sup>

Despite major achievements in the last decade, education performance in Afghanistan is still among the poorest in the world, and the current rate of improvement will fail to achieve the MDGs target by 2020. Target number 3 of the second goal is to ensure that by 2020 all children in Afghanistan, boys and girls alike, will be able to complete a full course of primary education. Under this goal the net enrolment rate (NER) in primary education for Afghanistan for 2014, 2015 and 2020 have been set 76%, 82% and 100% respectively. Based on the Afghanistan Millennium Development Goals 10 Years Report (2005-2015), in 2014, the NER in primary education was 76%. However, the ratios varied by sex and region. The NER for boys was nearly 1% in 2014 and it was only 0.6% for girls meaning that 95 boys and only 59 girls were enrolled.<sup>xii</sup>

Moreover, according to the estimation of MoE around 400,000 students drop out each year because of lack of schools for higher grades, particularly for girls, girls' marriage

before completing school, shortage of female teachers, lack of girls' school, cultural beliefs about the importance of girls' education, lack of necessary facilities at school and poverty. There are no female teachers in almost 80 districts (out of 364 districts) and there are no qualified female teachers in the majority of the districts, especially for secondary grades. More than half of teachers do not have required qualifications and many children do not have access to complete sets of textbooks.<sup>xiii</sup> So, to overcome the girls' education disparity, systematic and continuous efforts are needed in the country.

In light of the challenges and inequitable access that girls face in the country, the following set of recommendations is submitted for consideration by Access to Education Coalition:

- Along with advocacy allies, especially community and religious leaders, organize awareness raising campaigns on the Constitution of Afghanistan specifically articles 17, 22, 43, 44, 45 and 54, and Education Law particularly articles 2, 3, 18, 33 and 39 as well as woman rights under Islam;
- With the support of community and religious leaders organize advocacy campaigns for elimination of cultural barriers such as early marriage and undervaluing the importance of girls' education in the light of Islamic principles and national laws;
- Advocate for schools and other training centers to fully apply education law especially articles that are mentioned above;
- Advocate for MoE to endorse and effectively apply the National Education strategic Plan (2017-2021) in the country;
- Advocate with Ministry of Education to recruit and deploy qualified teachers to rural areas, and provide schools educational materials on timely basis.
- Advocate for the effective implementation of national literacy program all over the country;
- Advocate with MoE for improving access, quality and management of technical and vocational education and training especially for women;
- Conduct oversight of the implementation of laws, regulations and gender policies related to education and gender equality;
- Advocate for government line ministries specially Ministry of Women Affairs, Ministry of Education, Ministry of Higher Education and Ministry of Hajj and Religious Affairs and their directorates to fully apply NAPWA particularly pillar number 3;
- Conduct research on cases of inequitable access of girls to education and prepare position papers to be submitted to the relevant committees of parliament.

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<sup>i</sup> Ministry of Education of Afghanistan, *Afghanistan National Education for All (EFA) Review Report*, p. 11, 2015, available at: [http://moe.gov.af/Content/files/FINAL-EFA%202015%20Review%20Afghanistan-June%202015%20\(1\).pdf](http://moe.gov.af/Content/files/FINAL-EFA%202015%20Review%20Afghanistan-June%202015%20(1).pdf)

<sup>iii</sup> Ministry of Economy, *Afghanistan Millennium Development Goals 10 Years Report (2005-2015)*, available at: [http://moec.gov.af/Content/files/MDG%20Final%20Report%20v6-2\(1\).pdf](http://moec.gov.af/Content/files/MDG%20Final%20Report%20v6-2(1).pdf)

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- iii Ministry of Economy, *Afghanistan Millennium Development Goals 10 Years Report*, p. 36, (2005-2015), available at: [http://moec.gov.af/Content/files/MDG%20Final%20Report%20v6-2\(1\).pdf](http://moec.gov.af/Content/files/MDG%20Final%20Report%20v6-2(1).pdf)
- iv Constitution of Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, art. 43, 818 [series], 2004, available at: [http://moj.gov.af/content/files/Pages/OfficialGazetteIndex\\_D-header.htm](http://moj.gov.af/content/files/Pages/OfficialGazetteIndex_D-header.htm)
- v Education Law of Afghanistan, art. 3, 955 [series], 2008, available at: [http://moj.gov.af/content/files/Pages/OfficialGazetteIndex\\_D-header.htm](http://moj.gov.af/content/files/Pages/OfficialGazetteIndex_D-header.htm)
- vi The final version of the National Education Strategic Plan (2017-2021) has been prepared but is waiting for the approval and endorsement of Education Minister.
- vii Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission, available at: <http://www.aihrc.org.af/home/document/747>
- viii Available at: <http://www.unic-ir.org/hr/convention-child.htm>
- ix Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission, available at: <http://www.aihrc.org.af/home/document/736>
- x Ministry of Education, the National Education Strategic Plan (2017-2021)
- xi National Action Plan for the Women of Afghanistan.
- xii Ministry of Economy, *Afghanistan Millennium Development Goals 10 Years Report*, p. 35-37, (2005-2015), available at: [http://moec.gov.af/Content/files/MDG%20Final%20Report%20v6-2\(1\).pdf](http://moec.gov.af/Content/files/MDG%20Final%20Report%20v6-2(1).pdf)
- xiii Ministry of Education, *Afghanistan National Education for All (EFA) Review Report*, p. 28-29, (2015)