

## **Priority Issue: Access to Healthcare**

Although some aspects of the health care system have improved since the years of neglect by the Taliban regime, Afghanistan's health status is still one of the worst in the world. Lack of services – especially in the rural areas – and existing cultural practices both play a role in perpetuating poor health practices and constraints to health-seeking behavior for men as well as women. Afghan women have less access to health information, health care services, and resources to protect their health and their families' health.

In Afghanistan, women and children have a distinctly higher burden of illness and death, with the higher mortality rate for women mainly due to causes related to pregnancy and childbirth.

According to the Afghanistan's Demographic and Health Survey conducted in 2015, the adult mortality rate for women and men who have reached age 15, the probability of dying before age 50 is 12% and 8%, respectively. And the pregnancy-related mortality ratio was 1,291 maternal deaths per 100,000 live births for the seven-year period before the survey.<sup>i</sup>

The most recent ranking by the United Nations Human Development Index (HDI), an index that measures health, education, and income, ranks Afghanistan 169th out of 188 countries.<sup>ii</sup>

Low literacy rates, lack of knowledge of health problems and practices, and restrictions on their movement and access to money also limit women's ability to access proper or timely health services for themselves and their children.

According to the Afghanistan National Education for All (EFA) Review Report published in 2015, 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>iii</sup> Other challenges include:

- Restoring and upgrading healthcare facilities, including expanded provision of services to rural areas where women have easier access;
- Ensuring availability of essential and high-quality drugs;
- Training health workers for sectors where shortage is acute (e.g. midwives, female nurses); and,
- Educating women, especially in rural areas, on basic health information and practices.

To enhance women's access to healthcare, following the bellow initiative can be helpful:

1. Organize awareness raising campaigns to inform people about women's rights to health in light of national laws and Islamic principles, eliminate cultural barriers against women's access to the healthcare system;
2. Organize advocacy campaigns to encourage community people to pay attention to women's health and to not restrict their access to health centers;

3. Lobby and advocate to the Ministry of Public Health (MoPH), its directorate, and other national and international NGOs working in health sector to train rural women on basic healthcare issues as well as train on a regular basis the health workers in the provinces;
4. Advocate to relevant government ministries and agencies to build clinics and hospitals in underserved areas, employ qualified health workers, and provide quality health services to the community people.

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<sup>i</sup> Central Statistics Office and Ministry of Public Health, *Afghanistan Demographic and Health Survey*, 2015, available at: <https://dhsprogram.com/pubs/pdf/FR323/FR323.pdf>

<sup>ii</sup> United Nations Development Programme, *Human Development Report*, 2016, available at: [http://hdr.undp.org/sites/default/files/2016\\_human\\_development\\_report.pdf](http://hdr.undp.org/sites/default/files/2016_human_development_report.pdf)

<sup>iii</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)