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# Afghanistan: Gender Overview

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# Afghanistan: Gender Overview

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KSC Research Series

## ABSTRACT:

The Key Issues section, starting on page 7, provides a snapshot of the main topics highlighted in this report.

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## Gender Equality Profile for Afghanistan

	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
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### Gender Rankings and Ratings

Gender Inequality Index Rank	.	.	.	.	.	134	.	.	141	.
Gender Inequality Index Value (0=equal, to 1=highest inequality between men and women)	.	.	.	.	.	0.8	.	.	0.71	.

### Population and Health

Population, total	28,255,719	29,068,646	29,904,962	30,751,661	31,622,333	32,517,656	33,438,329	34,385,068	.	.
Population, female (% of total)	48.23	48.23	48.24	48.24	48.25	48.25	48.26	48.26	.	.
Fertility rate, total (births per woman)	7.3	7.1	7	6.8	6.7	6.6	6.4	.	.	.
Life expectancy at birth, female (years)	46.2	46.4	46.7	47	47.3	47.7	48.1	.	.	.
Life expectancy at birth, male (years)	46	46.3	46.5	46.8	47.1	47.4	47.8	.	.	.
Births attended by skilled health staff (% of total)	14.3	.	.	18.9	.	24	.	.	.	.
Contraceptive prevalence (% of women ages 15-49)	10.3	.	13.6	18.6	.	22.8	.	.	.	.
Median Age at First Birth for Women Ages 25-49**								20		
Median Age of First Marriage for Women Ages 25-49**								17.7		
Infant Mortality for Years 2006-2010 (per 1,000 live births) **								65		
Under 5 Child Mortality for Years 2006-2010 (per 1,000 live births) **								84		
Proportion of pregnancy related deaths to all female deaths, ages 15-19**								32.2		
Proportion of pregnancy related deaths to all female deaths, ages 20-24**								46.7		
Proportion of pregnancy related deaths to all female deaths, ages 25-29**								51.8		
Life expectancy at birth for females (in years)**								64.2		
Life expectancy at birth for males (in years) **								63.6		

### Education

Expected years of schooling, female	4.80	4.50	5.31	6.07	5.89	.	6.79	.	.	.
Expected years of schooling, male	8.86	11.18	9.73	10.64	10.40	.	11.25	.	.	.
Primary education, pupils (% female)	34.76	29.13	35.69	37.23	36.89	37.78	38.57	39.34	.	.
Primary education, teachers (% female)	.	.	.	.	27.69	29.00	29.47	31.00	.	.
Ratio of female to male primary enrollment (%)	57.00	43.95	59.36	63.46	62.56	64.98	67.19	69.43	.	.
Ratio of female to male secondary enrollment (%)	34.91	20.96	32.84	36.65	37.91	43.13	48.88	50.58	.	.
School enrollment, primary, female (% of gross)	61.69	57.81	66.39	72.29	70.32	74.15	73.78	79.07	.	.
School enrollment, primary, male (% of gross)	108.21	131.53	111.84	113.91	112.39	114.11	109.81	113.89	.	.

School enrollment, secondary, female (%of gross)	5.98	5.55	8.37	13.58	13.87	20.30	25.78	30.23	.	.
School enrollment, secondary, male (%of gross)	17.12	26.48	25.48	37.04	36.59	47.06	52.74	59.78	.	.
Overall female literacy (% of total)	.	.	.	.	12	.	.	.	.	.
Overall male literacy (% of total)	.	.	.	.	39	.	.	.	.	.
Primary completion rate, female (% of relevant age group)	.	.	18.7	.	.	.	.	.	.	.
Primary completion rate, male (%)	.	.	48.4	.	.	.	.	.	.	.
Gender parity index for gross enrolment ratio. Primary	0.57	0.44	0.59	0.63	0.63	0.65	0.67	0.69	.	.
Gender parity index for gross enrolment ratio. Secondary. All programs	0.35	0.21	0.33	0.37	0.38	0.43	0.49	0.51	.	.
Gender parity index for gross enrolment ratio. Tertiary	0.28	0.28	.	.	.	.	0.24	.	.	.
<b>Employment</b>										
Female Labor Participation (% of female pop., ages 15+)	59	59.1	59.3	59.4	59.6	59.7	59.8	.	.	.
Labor Force, Female (% of total labor force)	25.74	25.86	25.94	26.15	26.31	26.59	26.64	.	.	.
Share of Women Employed in the non-agricultural sector (% of total non-agricultural employment)	17.8	18.5	25.9	18	17.6	18.4	.	.	.	.
Unemployment, female (% of female labor force)	.	.	9.5	.	.	.	.	.	.	.
<b>Governance</b>										
% of seats held by women in national parliaments	.	.	.	.	27.3	27.7	27.7	27.7	27.7	.
<b>Information and Communication Technology (ICT)</b>										
Mobile Gender Gap (%)	.	.	.	.	.	.	78	.	.	.
Female Mobile Phone Subscribers (in thousands)	.	.	.	.	.	.	1,329	.	.	.
Male Mobile Phone Subscribers (in thousands)	.	.	.	.	.	.	6,488.70	.	.	.
Female Mobile Phone Penetration (%)	.	.	.	.	.	.	10	.	.	.
Male Mobile Phone Penetration (%)	.	.	.	.	.	.	45	.	.	.
<b>Environment</b>										
Improved Water Source	.	.	41	.	.	48	.	.	.	.
Improved Sanitation Facilities	.	.	35	.	.	37	.	.	.	.
Climate Change Vulnerability Index (values closer to 0 signify higher risk; closer to 10, lower risk)	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	3.2 (rank: 38th out of 193 countries)

SOURCES: UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS) Database; United Nations Development Program (UNDP) Human Development Report; World Bank, World Development Indicators; Maplecroft; International Telecommunication Union, World Telecommunication/ICT Indicators Database

\*\*Designates data obtained from the Afghanistan Mortality Survey 2010, which is viewable at: <http://measuredhs.com/pubs/pdf/FR248/FR248.pdf>. This data, depending upon the indicator, covers the years 2006-2010 in some sections, whereas in others, it documents the seven years prior to the survey's conclusion in 2010. These details are provided in the document above.

## Key Issues by Sector

### ***Economic Growth***

- Afghanistan's labor force comprises 27% women in 2009, a nominal upturn since 2000. The country's female labor force remains smaller than the world average (40%) and South Asia's (29%). More Afghan women are entering the labor force, however, as a result of higher rates of widowhood (due to conflict) and female-headed households.
- Because female participation in the formal economy is limited, Afghan women play a significant role in the informal economy, mainly agriculture.
  - In 2008, 44% of Afghanistan's agricultural workforce comprised of women, equivalent to the world average. Their work in this sector, however, is largely informal and unpaid.
  - Based on 2010 Afghanistan Mortality Survey (AMS) data, the agricultural sector accounts for a third of the country's GDP and employs roughly 80% of Afghans. This sector is dependent on cereal, and primarily wheat cultivation, and other annual crop production which account for about 80% of agricultural production. Livestock production contributes 14% of agricultural GDP while fruit and nut production, which is widely expected to be the impetus for agricultural growth in the future, contributes 6%.
- Between 2002 and 2005, the ratio of Afghan women working in nonagricultural sectors grew from 19% to 26%, though still below the world average (36%). By 2008, this percentage plunged to 18.4%.
- Afghan women often have no choice but to become self-employed in order to earn an income. A growing number find that handicraft skills are the foundation for home-based businesses. In 2011, an estimated 242 women-owned companies were registered in a national database of 7,000 Afghan-owned companies.
- Per capita GDP in 2002 was US\$1,182 for males and US\$402 for females, revealing that Afghan women earned 34% less than their male counterparts. Recent reports estimate that Afghan women's wages are 40-60% less than men's.
- The Afghan government has set a target to ensure that, by 2013, 30% of all government employees are women.

### ***Democracy and Governance***

- The security situation in Afghanistan has greatly deteriorated in the past year, threatening prior progress made in the areas of gender, democracy, and governance.
- In 2011, anti-government attacks increased to 40 a day in the first half of the year, an increase of 42% since 2010, and 119% since 2009. In addition, there was a 73% increase in attacks against aid workers.
- Civilian casualties rose to 1,462 deaths in the first half of 2011, a 15% increase since 2010, and approximately 80% of these incidents were attributed to the anti-government insurgency.
- Although Afghanistan has the highest regional percentage of female parliamentarians (27%), gender mainstreaming has not been effectively implemented across government ministries, misunderstandings persist regarding the role of gender programming at national and local levels, and gender inequality is endemic in legal and judicial institutions.

### ***Education***

- Women in Afghanistan have long been deprived of education. Their literacy level is one of the lowest compared with other countries. However, there has been improvement over the past several years with Article 44 of the Constitution that legally protects the rights of women to education.
- A deteriorating security situation nation-wide has resulted in targeted attacks against educational institutions, especially girls' schools.
- Prevalent local opposition to girls' education for various reasons including: the influence of traditional cultural norms; concerns for girls' safety in light of Taliban and other insurgent attacks against schools, students, and teachers; early and forced marriage as a social practice, and other instances of gender based violence within families and/or communities.
- While there has been some success in recent government initiatives to provide girls with access to education, the 2010 Afghanistan Mortality Survey (AMS) reports that 76% of Afghan women have had no formal education. Women in the South zone (87%) are most likely to have no education, as compared to

women who live in the Central (67%) and North (75%) zones. The proportion of women who have no education ranges from a low of 62% in the Capital region to a high of 96% in the South Eastern region.

- Poor educational quality characterized by a shortage of female educators, especially in a cultural environment which tends to proscribe girls and young women from being instructed by male teachers; poor access, namely in rural areas (it is estimated that there are 8,500 schools for 38,000 villages total, and some students will walk 2-3 hours to the closest school).
- Health hazards: it is estimated that only 30% of schools actually consist of completed building structures. In Kabul, 40% of schools are not located in enclosed structures, and the rate for rural schools is far lower.
- Teacher qualifications and female representation remain issues which merit further attention: only 28% of teachers nation-wide are women. The National Education Strategic Plan claims that a mere 22% of teachers meet the minimum qualification of passing grade 14, the last one of secondary school. In a 2005 survey in northern Afghanistan, 200 teachers took the same exam as their students, and only 10 —5% — passed.

### **Health**

- The UNDP estimates that Afghanistan's maternal mortality ratio (MMR) is at 1600 per 100,000 live births. Nearly half of all deaths among women of reproductive age are a result of pregnancy and childbirth-related causes, and nearly 75% of these deaths are preventable.
- According to the UNDP, Kabul has an MMR of 400 per 100,000, whereas the rural district of Badakhshan reported an MMR of 6,500 per 100,000 births. The latter is the highest recorded rate globally, and only a few other countries are comparable—Angola with 1700, Malawi with 1800, and Sierra Leone with 2000 deaths per live births. In addition, whereas 52% of mothers in urban locales can seek professional health assistance, only 9% of women in rural areas have this option.
- According to the 2010 Afghanistan Mortality Survey (AMS), between 2003-2010 the country's pregnancy-related mortality rate remained moderately high, at 59%. There were 327 deaths per 100,000 live births during this period, equivalent to 3 deaths per 1,000 live births or 0.3 percent of all live births. This is higher than Nepal (281 deaths per 100,000 live births), Pakistan (297), and Bangladesh (194). Pregnancy-related deaths in Afghanistan accounted for 41% of all deaths to women age 15-49 during this seven year period.
- There are several social conditions which contribute to this high mortality rate, such as: high rates of early marriage, including forced child marriages, a high fertility rate and lack of spacing between frequent births, poor nutrition, the lack of adequate healthcare and medical facilities, especially in rural areas, and the lack of reproductive health education and awareness among both men and women.

### **Environment and Energy**

- Women throughout the developing world are disproportionately vulnerable to the effects of climate change. The Maplecroft Climate Change Vulnerability Index, which analyzes and maps countries' ability to adapt to climate change, categorizes Afghanistan as a higher risk, as are Pakistan, India, Indonesia, and Bangladesh.
- Water scarcity, as a result of drought, is the most adverse impact of climate change in Afghanistan. Last year, poor rains negatively impacted 14 drought-laden provinces, where families have been unable to grow enough wheat to feed themselves. Female-headed households are especially at risk.
- As a result of decades of conflict, poverty, climate change, and population growth, Afghanistan's environment and natural resource base is under severe pressure. Given women's integral role in the country's agricultural sector (44% are employed in it), as well as their lack of access to and control over resources, they are especially vulnerable to natural resource degradation and other environmental shocks.
- Afghan women's use of tandoors for cooking and heating exposes them (and children) to health-damaging pollutants. Afghanistan is one of the top 10 countries with the most serious health and environmental problems related to cook stoves.
- Increased deforestation has led to an acute shortage of firewood. Since women and girls customarily are responsible for collecting firewood, they are having a more difficult time meeting household energy needs.
- Afghan women constitute half of the country's population, yet they are under-represented in all decision making bodies, including those with a focus on environmental protection. One woman, Dr. Habiba Sarabi, has become a positive role model for local communities. Since creating Afghanistan's first national park,

Band-e Amir, Dr. Sarabi is helping to reverse environmental damage that decades of war have left on the country's land and waterways.

### ***Water and Sanitation***

- Access to clean drinking water is a significant problem in Afghanistan. The only other country in the world with less access to improved water source is Somalia. Afghan women, in particular, feel the greatest impact by the lack of water, inadequate sanitation and low levels of hygiene, but are rarely involved in water systems management.
  - According to the 2010 Afghanistan Mortality Survey (AMS), however, access to safe drinking water has increased recently. Just over one in two Afghan households obtain drinking water from an improved source, with three-quarters of urban households and half of rural households having access to safe drinking water.
  - Nevertheless, the country has a long way to go in improving sanitation. Based on AMS data, only one-fifth of households have an improved toilet facility, four-fifths have a non-improved toilet facility, and one-fifth have no toilet facility at all.
- In 2009, 75% of Afghanistan's schools did not have safe sanitation facilities and only 60% had water, which greatly impacts Afghan girls' ability to attend school.
- Afghan women and children (mostly girls under the age of 15) are predominantly responsible for collecting their families' water each day. This time-consuming activity also prevents girls from attending school, and it restricts women's ability to engage in productive employment. In Kuchi, women spend about 40 minutes per day collecting water. In other provinces, the time needed is higher – in Badghis, women spend 2+ hours/day obtaining water.
- Afghan women and girls also face unsafe conditions when traveling outside their hometown to collect water.
- Afghan female-headed households – on the rise – are less likely to be able to afford water; cultural perceptions also prevent them from accessing public sanitation sites.
- Water availability is closely linked to food security. Crop failures, devastation of livestock and severe shortages of drinking water put much of the Afghan rural population at risk of starvation. Women farmers, in particular, are impacted by water.

### ***Information and Communication Technology (ICT)***

- In general, the Information and Communication Technology (ICT) sector in Afghanistan, including the use of computers and mobile phones, is dominated by men. Social and cultural obstacles prevent women from using these technologies, as do limited Internet access and low rates of computer literacy and ownership.
- Nonetheless, Afghan women are interested in ICT and its applications. Female students comprise at least 36% of each graduating class from Kabul University's Computer Science Department.
- The Mobile Gender Gap is significant in Afghanistan, where women are 78% less likely to own a phone than their male counterparts.
- Afghan men typically view the main reason for a woman to have a mobile phone as a connection between herself and her family, or her workplace. Use outside this circle is often viewed with suspicion.
- The price of Internet service in Afghanistan remains high; therefore the Internet is only accessible to a small segment of the population. Most Afghans go to Internet cafés and public computer centers. Women are either barred from entering these facilities, or may face harassment from men.
- In early March 2012, the country's first female-only Internet café was opened in Kabul, creating a safe environment for women.

## Economic Growth

<b>Afghanistan Gender and Economic Growth Snapshot</b>										
	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
<b>Female Labor Force</b> (% of total labor force)	25.5	25.5	25.6	25.7	25.9	25.9	26.2	26.3	26.6	26.6
For Comparison:										
<b>World</b> Female Labor Force (%)	39.6	39.7	39.7	39.7	39.7	39.8	39.9	40.0	40.0	40.0
<b>Southern Asia</b> Female Labor Force (%)	27.8	27.8	27.8	27.8	27.9	28.1	28.4	28.6	28.9	28.9
<b>Female Labor Force Participation Rate</b> (% of female population 15+ years)	31.3	31.3	31.4	31.6	31.8	32.0	32.3	32.6	33.0	33.1
<b>World</b> Female Labor Force Participation (%)	51.7	51.6	51.6	51.5	51.4	51.5	51.7	51.7	51.8	51.7
<b>Southern Asia</b> Female Labor Force Participation (%)	33.9	33.8	33.7	33.7	33.7	34.0	34.4	34.6	34.9	34.7
<b>Females Employed in Agriculture</b> (%)	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	44.0	.
<b>Females Employed in Non-Agriculture</b> (%)			19.2	17.8	18.5	25.9	18.0	17.6	18.4	.
<b>Female Unemployment</b> (% of female labor force)	.	.	.	.	.	9.5	.	.	.	.
<b>Per capita GDP (PPP), Male</b> (US\$)	.	.	\$1,182	.	.	.	.	.	.	.
<b>Per capita GDP (PPP), Female</b> (US\$)	..	.	\$402	.	.	.	.	.	.	.

### Key Issues

- Afghanistan's labor force comprises 27% women in 2009, a nominal upturn since 2000. The country's female labor force remains smaller than the world average (40%) and South Asia's (29%). More Afghan women are entering the labor force, however, as a result of higher rates of widowhood (due to conflict) and female-headed households.
- Because female participation in the formal economy is limited, Afghan women play a significant role in the informal economy, mainly agriculture.
  - In 2008, 44% of Afghanistan's agricultural workforce comprised of women, equivalent to the world average. Their work in this sector, however, is largely informal and unpaid.
  - Based on 2010 Afghanistan Mortality Survey (AMS) data, the agricultural sector accounts for a third of the country's GDP and employs roughly 80% of Afghans. This sector is dependent on cereal, and primarily wheat cultivation, and other annual crop production which account for about 80% of agricultural production. Livestock production contributes 14% of agricultural GDP while fruit and nut production, which is widely expected to be the impetus for agricultural growth in the future, contributes 6%.
- Between 2002 and 2005, the ratio of Afghan women working in nonagricultural sectors grew from 19% to 26%, though still below the world average (36%). By 2008, this percentage plunged to 18.4%.
- Afghan women often have no choice but to become self-employed in order to earn an income. A growing number find that handicraft skills are the foundation for home-based businesses. In 2011, an estimated 242 women-owned companies were registered in a national database of 7,000 Afghan-owned companies.
- Per capita GDP in 2002 was US\$1,182 for males and US\$402 for females, revealing that Afghan women earned 34% less than their male counterparts. Recent reports estimate that Afghan women's wages are 40-60% less than men's.
- The Afghan government has set a target to ensure that, by 2013, 30% of all government employees are women.

### Old Problems, New Challenges

Following the Taliban's overthrow in 2001, the situation for Afghan women has improved slightly, but not significantly. Article 48 of the country's Constitution (ratified in 2004) gives women the right to work.<sup>1</sup> Deep-rooted problems still persist, however, including limited access to education and illiteracy, and a lack of employment opportunities and equal rights.<sup>2</sup> New problems also have appeared. The country's economic

“Although women are often contributors to household economy, through agriculture, livestock management, handicrafts, involvement in small and medium enterprises and civil service, their contributions are either completely non-monetized, hugely underpaid (in the agriculture sector, women’s wages are often even lower than that of children) or undervalued. Many women who earn an income are not permitted to control their earnings.”  
 Source: NAPWA 2007-2017

condition makes trafficking of women and children<sup>1</sup> a growing concern<sup>3</sup> – in the form of abductions for forced marriage, forced prostitution and domestic servitude. Individuals are now more vulnerable to trafficking as a result of more than two decades of conflict, a persistently unstable economy, and worsening insecurity. Another factor is a high rate of gender-based violence.<sup>4</sup>

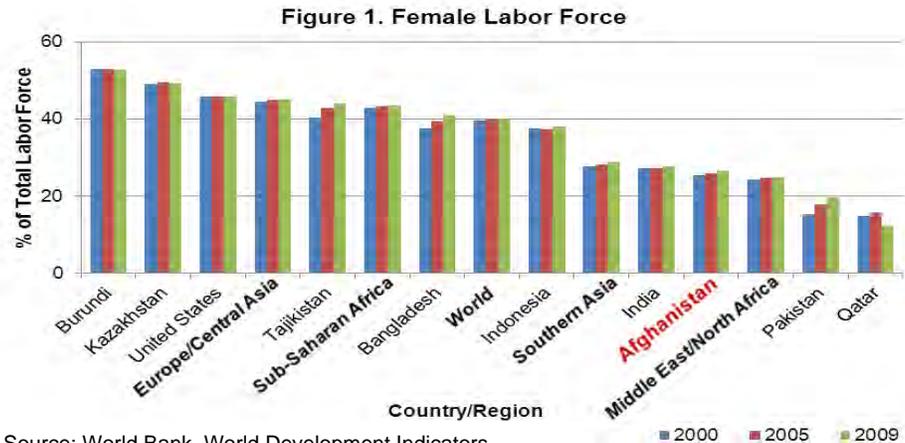
More Afghan women also have entered the labor force due to a high frequency of widowhood (a result of conflict) and female-headed households (FHH). In the 1970s, FHHs were rare – 1.1% in urban and 1.2% in rural areas. By 2005, FHH prevalence had grown, to 16% in Kabul and 4% - 20% in three Badakhshan districts.<sup>5</sup> Higher female labor force participation, however, does not automatically give

women control over resources or access to property rights.<sup>6</sup> A high portion of FHHs are landless and poor. Given constraints against Afghan women working outside the home in rural areas, as well as their lower human capital (i.e., education), there is still a need to expand their income-generating opportunities.

Child labor is another growing concern in Afghanistan. As UNICEF reports, it is rooted in poverty and socioeconomic inequalities based on gender and disability. It is estimated that 30% of Afghan children ages 5 to 14 participate in some form of work. Afghan girls, in particular, confront greater adversities due to discriminatory cultural norms. “More than boys, [girls] are expected to take on unpaid household work for their families, which may include child care, cooking, cleaning and fetching water and fuel.”<sup>7</sup>

**Female Labor Force**

In 2009, Afghanistan’s total labor force (10,642,376 workers) comprised of 26.6% women. This rate ranks Afghanistan 166<sup>th</sup> out of 183 countries, well below the world average (40%), but only slightly lower than South Asia region (28.9%) and India (27.6%). It has a comfortable lead over Pakistan (19.7%). Neighboring Kazakhstan (49.4%) and Tajikistan (44.1%) fare better than

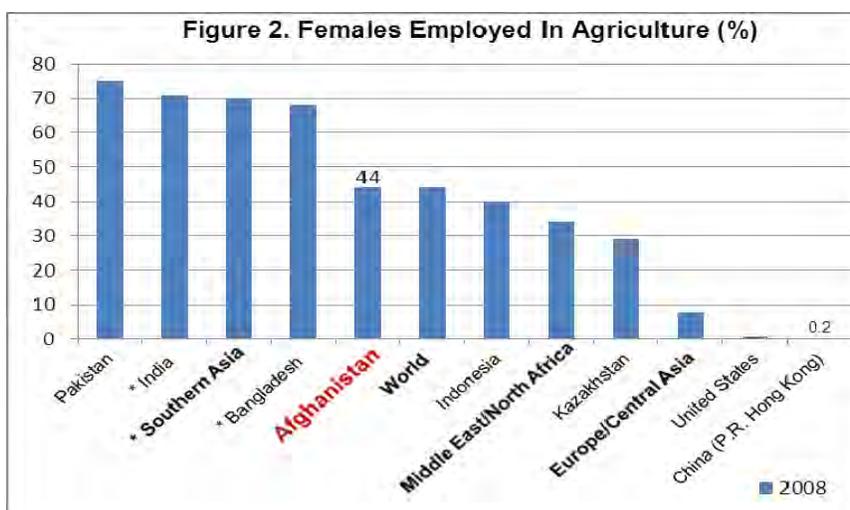


Afghanistan, as do Bangladesh (41.1%) and Indonesia (38.1%). In contrast, Burundi’s female labor force ranks highest in the world (52.6%), whereas Qatar’s is the lowest (12.5%).

**Informal Economy**

Like many developing nations, Afghan women’s economic participation is often invisible, informal, or unrecognized. Because female participation in the formal economy is limited, Afghan women play a significant role in the informal economy, mainly agriculture. Due to its traditionally agrarian economy, informal agricultural production is largely a household activity, and Afghan women and children often play an important role alongside men in crop production, horticulture, and rearing livestock. 44% of Afghanistan’s agricultural workforce comprises of women (see below). Afghan women in the informal sector also depend on petty trade, exchange services between households, and small scale business as major sources of income.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>1</sup> According to the U.S. Department of State’s *Trafficking in Persons Report 2011*, Afghanistan is a source, transit, and destination country for men, women, and children subjected to forced labor and sex trafficking. Source: <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/164453.pdf> (page 62)



Source: World Bank, World Development Indicators; Afghanistan and World data taken from the 2007-08 *National Risk and Vulnerability Assessment (NRVA)*

### Agriculture

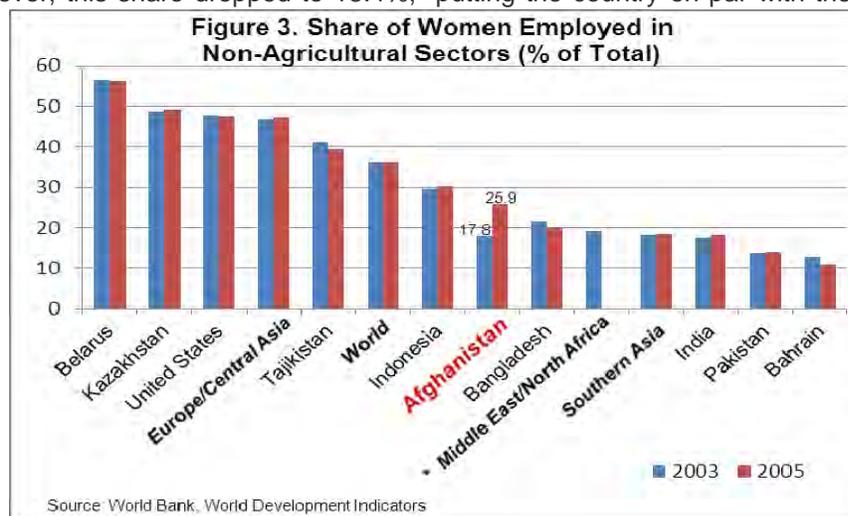
With nearly 80% of its population living in rural areas, Afghanistan's economy is heavily skewed towards agriculture.<sup>9</sup> In 2002, the sector totaled 45% of Afghanistan's GDP, dipping to 30% in 2010.<sup>10</sup> The 2007-2008 *National Risk and Vulnerability Assessment (NRVA)* for Afghanistan reports that roughly 59% of the total employed population engages in agriculture or livestock.<sup>11</sup> The NRVA also indicates that 44% of Afghan women are employed in agriculture and livestock, equal to

the world average.<sup>12</sup> Consequently, agricultural and related activities are a significant means for female economic participation in Afghanistan.

Despite variation by district, Afghan women "make large labor contributions to a range of marketed products such as dried fruits, opium, fuel wood, dairy products and handicrafts."<sup>13</sup> The report further indicates that "Surveys ... confirm 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."<sup>14</sup> Afghan women's agricultural labor is largely unpaid.

### Non-Agricultural Work

The portion of Afghan women employed in nonagricultural sectors was nearly 26% in 2005, slightly below the world average (36%). In 2008, however, this share dropped to 18.4%,<sup>2</sup> putting the country on par with the South Asia region as a whole, which has the world's lowest regional share. During 2007-2009, a number of other countries logged notable fluctuations, as well. Bangladeshi women's non-agricultural employment doubled from 20% to 48%. India's rose from 18% to 49%; Indonesia's from 30% to 49%; Algeria 15% to 47%; and Iran 16% to 51%. Alternatively, other countries felt a decrease – Russia 51% to 30%; Estonia 53% to 13%; and Belarus 56% to 37%. Regionally, Latin America and the Caribbean dropped from 41% to 18%, as did the European Union, 47% to 16%.



\* 2005 data unavailable

### Female Entrepreneurship

The 2007-2008 NRVA report highlights sectors with substantial female contributions. For instance, in Afghanistan's urban areas, a gender balance is evident in the education and manufacturing sectors (49%

<sup>2</sup> For this indicator, sporadic data are available post-2005 from World Bank, World Development Indicators.

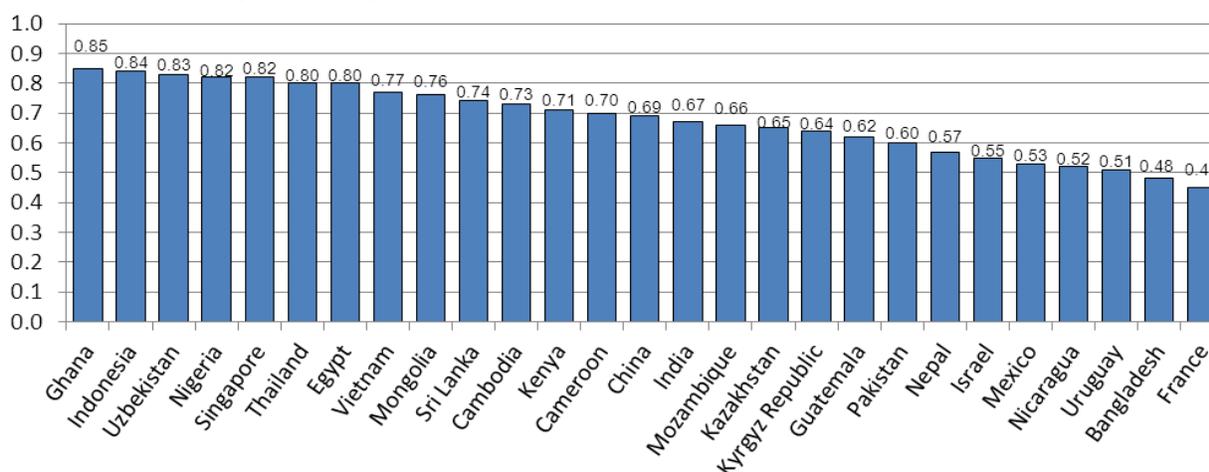
and 48% women employed, respectively).<sup>15</sup> In addition, female participation is sizable in “other services” (32%) and manufacturing, where a majority of women work in home-based craft businesses (70-95%, depending on location). Despite myriad challenges, a growing number of Afghan women are finding that home-based handicraft skills form the basis of their own business. In many cases, since the country’s total unemployment rate is 35% (2008 est.),<sup>16</sup> Afghan women often have no choice but to become self-employed in order to earn an income. In 2011, the USAID-funded Peace Dividend Trust estimated that 242 women-owned companies are registered in a national database<sup>3</sup> of 7,000 Afghan-owned companies.<sup>17</sup>

Women-owned firms in Afghanistan face many obstacles, with the single biggest ranked as limited access to financing.<sup>18</sup> Other obstacles include: patriarchal social norms, competition from other home businesses, low demand for goods and services, conflicts with family/ household duties, irregular/seasonal work, being paid by the piece (not daily wage), lack of social protection benefits, unhealthy/inadequate work conditions, little opportunity for skills training, and limited representation (i.e., unions, business associations).<sup>19</sup>

### Wage Inequality

No country in the world pays women a wage equal to that of men, and Afghanistan is no exception. One measure of gender disparity is to compare female-male GDP adjusted for PPP (Purchasing Power Parity). Afghanistan’s *National Human Development Report (NHDR) 2004*<sup>20</sup> indicates per capita GDP (PPP) in 2002 was US\$1,182 for males and US\$402 for females, which indicates females earn 34% less. In 2005, the World Bank estimated that Afghan female wages were only half (or less) of men’s.<sup>21</sup> Similarly, the 2003 *NRVA* states that, for similar work, Afghan men receive a higher salary than women. For agricultural work, such as planting and harvesting, *NRVA* reports that women receive 50-61% less. In non-agricultural jobs, like handicrafts, weaving, and gathering wood, women make 40-53% less.<sup>22</sup>

Figure 4. Wage Equity Between Women and Men for Similar Work



Source: The Global Gender Gap Report from the World Economic Forum, Executive Opinion Survey 2007

### Moving Forward

The *National Action Plan for the Women of Afghanistan (NAPWA) (2007-2017)*<sup>23</sup> acknowledges the weak position of women in the economy. The Plan prioritizes improving women’s economic status through the “creat[ion of] an enabling economic and social environment that is conducive to the full development and realization of women’s economic potential.” This goal correlates with Afghanistan’s Millennium Development Goal (MDG) to “reduce gender disparity in economic areas by 2020.”<sup>24</sup> The Afghan government also set a 2013 target that will ensure 30% of all government employees be women; in 2009, the Gender Directorate within the Civil Service Commission was created to help achieve this.<sup>25</sup> Since 2002, when Afghanistan’s transitional government was established, various government offices have been formed, including the Ministry of Women’s Affairs.<sup>4</sup> MOWA fosters women’s empowerment by working with various government agencies to ensure that their policies, plans, and resources incorporate a gender perspective.

<sup>3</sup> Peace Dividend Marketplace Afghanistan: <http://afghanistan.buildingmarkets.org/>

<sup>4</sup> <http://mowa.gov.af/en>

**Afghanistan Mortality Survey (AMS) Data (2010)**

- “About 36 percent of the country’s population is unemployed and lives below the poverty threshold. There are shortages of housing, clean drinking water, electricity, and employment (World Bank, 2010)” (p. 3).
- “The Afghan economy has always been based on agriculture, although only 12 percent of its total land is arable and less than 6 percent is currently cultivated. The agricultural sector accounts for about one-third of the country’s GDP and employs an estimated 80 percent of Afghans (GAIN, 2011). It is dependent on cereal, and primarily wheat cultivation, and other annual crop production which account for about 80 percent of agricultural production. Livestock production contributes 14 percent of agricultural GDP while fruit and nut production, which is widely expected to be the impetus for agricultural growth in the future, contributes 6 percent” (p. 4).

Full survey data is available at: <http://measuredhs.com/pubs/pdf/FR248/FR248.pdf>

## Democracy and Governance

Scorecard: Women in National Parliaments (% to total)

Country	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
<b>Afghanistan</b>	27.3	27.7	27.7	27.7	27.7
<b>Europe and Central Asia</b>	21.1	21.2	21.5	22.1	22.3
<b>Latin America and Caribbean</b>	19.7	22.2	23	23.4	22.7
<b>North America</b>	18.2	18.7	19	19	20
<b>East Asia and Oceania</b>	17.5	18	18.2	18.3	17.7
<b>World</b>	17.5	18.5	18.8	19.3	19.5
<b>Sub-Saharan Africa</b>	17.1	17.9	18.3	19.4	19.8
<b>Bangladesh</b>	15.1	.	18.6	18.6	18.6
<b>Southern Asia</b>	14.1	20.3	20.1	19.2	20.1
<b>Indonesia</b>	11.3	11.6	18.2	18	18
<b>Middle East and North Africa</b>	8.3	8.3	8.4	9	8.9
<b>India</b>	8.3	9.1	10.7	10.8	10.8

Source: World Bank World Development Indicators 2012

### Key Issues

- The security situation in Afghanistan has greatly deteriorated in the past year, threatening prior progress made in the areas of gender, democracy, and governance.
- In 2011, anti-government attacks increased to 40 a day in the first half of the year, an increase of 42% since 2010, and 119% since 2009. In addition, there was a 73% increase in attacks against aid workers.
- Civilian casualties rose to 1,462 deaths in the first half of 2011, a 15% increase since 2010, and approximately 80% of these incidents were attributed to the anti-government insurgency.<sup>26</sup>
- Although Afghanistan has the highest regional percentage of female parliamentarians (27%), gender mainstreaming has not been effectively implemented across government ministries, misunderstandings persist regarding the role of gender programming at national and local levels, and gender inequality is endemic in legal and judicial institutions.

At present, international forces have committed to a timetable of withdrawing by 2014, and are currently considering the possibility of engaging in negotiations with the Taliban and other anti-government forces to pursue a political resolution to the conflict. Numerous analysts, however, are concerned that women's rights will be compromised during the peace and reconciliation process. Such concerns are underpinned by recent developments: as Taliban and other anti-government insurgents acquire control over the southern, eastern, and northern provinces, progress in the area of gender has been reversed with increased attacks on girls' schools, restrictions on women's movement, and a surge in gender based violence in Taliban controlled areas. The Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission recorded 1,026 cases of violence against women in the second quarter of 2011 as opposed to 2,700 total cases in 2010.<sup>27</sup> In addition to this, the government has previously demonstrated a willingness to compromise women's rights for politically instrumental reasons. In 2009, prior to the presidential elections, President Karzai sought the support of conservative Shia voters, and approved the Shia Personal Status Law, which severely curtailed the rights of Shia women by legalizing marital rape, allowing husbands to deny food to their wives if they did not respond to sexual demands, granted custody of children to male relatives in the case of divorce, and required Shia women to seek their husbands' permission to work.<sup>28</sup>

This lack of political will to fully support gender equality is also reflected in the government's gestures toward women in the context of the nascent peace process. The Karzai government established a donor-funded Afghanistan Peace and Reintegration Programme (APRP), encompassing a 70-member High Peace Council, to pursue negotiations with the Taliban. The Council only includes nine women members. One

female member claimed, “We are trying to be involved in the peace process, but in my opinion, most of the time we’re not included in major discussions.”<sup>29</sup> The APRP also created provincial peace councils, each of which includes 20-35 individuals. However, each council only has a maximum of three women members, and other local women at a community level, especially given the low literacy and education rates among women 15 years of age and older, do not have a basic understanding of the plan, or the impact of various post-conflict arrangements in their own lives.<sup>30</sup> Women in general continue to be marginalized in discussions concerning post-conflict arrangements, a development which does not augur well for future negotiations with the Taliban or gender equality in the future.

### **Gender Mainstreaming and Government Ministries**

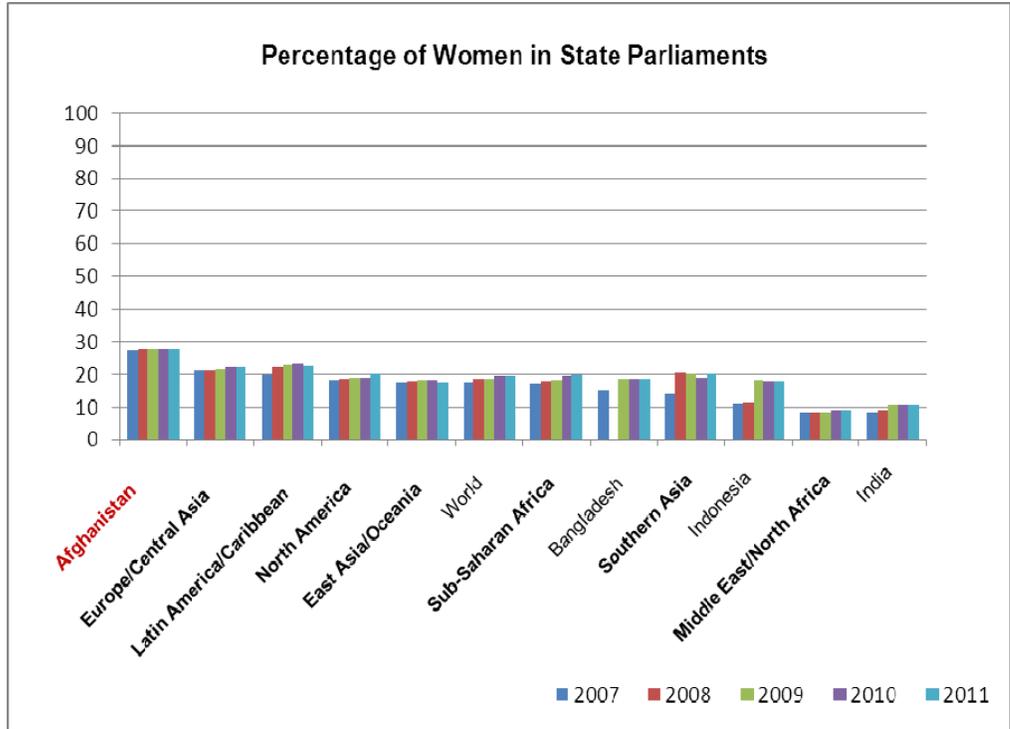
Since the fall of the Taliban, Afghanistan has made modest progress in pursuing gender equality in democratic institutions, yet myriad challenges remain. In 2003, Afghanistan acceded to the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), and its 2004 constitution provided various political and legal rights to Afghan women, including recognition of equality before the law (Article 22), the right to pursue and receive an education (Articles 43 and 44), and the right to work (Article 48). The Bonn Agreement also resulted in the creation of the Ministry of Women’s Affairs (MoWA) and the Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission.<sup>31</sup> In spite of such efforts, the MoWA often operates independently of other units, and gender mainstreaming is often not implemented consistently throughout the government.<sup>32</sup> Although gender mainstreaming has been pursued through the creation of gender units, working groups, women’s *shuras*, such entities struggle with a shortage of funds, a heavy dependence on international technical assistance, and the lack of support from the executive—issues which hinder ministries, especially the MoWA, from fulfilling their dual mandate: increasing gender awareness within ministries (internal), and developing policies to advance gender equality and programming (external). There is often a lack of coordination between ministries, and gender issues are often viewed as solely within the purview of the MoWA, rather than as factors that are multi-sectoral and a development priority for different ministries.<sup>33</sup> Moreover, female government officials continue to be the targets of harassment, violence, and death threats, especially from Taliban “night letters.” Consequently, there is one female minister at present compared to three in 2004, and the percentage of women in the civil service decreased from 31% in 2006 to 18.5% in 2010.<sup>34</sup>

An additional key issue is the fact that the term “gender” itself does not directly translate into Dari, Pashto, or other local languages, leading government officials to often use the English term. In Afghanistan, “gender” is often equated with the term “jensiyat,” meaning “sex” an issue that is problematic given that instead of addressing gender as a socially constructed set of power relations and social roles, it is limited to its popular equation with women’s issues, rather than the broader social dynamics which involve both men and women in the perpetuation of gender inequality. With this lack of direct translation, the term is also often viewed, even by Afghan government officials and members of parliament, as a foreign or “un-Islamic” term. With different interpretations or even confusion about the term, this has partially contributed to misunderstanding between ministries as to what “gender mainstreaming” actually involves as a process.<sup>35</sup> In addition to this, it is difficult to develop or even implement gender mainstreaming policies given the high turnover of employees and inconsistent support from the President’s office.<sup>36</sup> As mentioned earlier, President Karzai has demonstrated on numerous occasions his willingness to compromise gender equality and women’s rights to mobilize conservative and hardline support for political purposes. An example of this occurred earlier this year when Karzai supported the claims of Afghanistan’s senior Council of Islamic Scholars, which stated that women legally were “secondary to men,” calling for sex-segregation in educational institutions and the workplace, and demanding that women only travel in public with a male relative or *mahram*. Such practices are reminiscent of Taliban rule a decade ago, and signify Karzai’s intentions to reach out to conservatives and the Taliban prior to negotiations.<sup>37</sup>

**The Afghan Parliament**

Afghan women currently constitute 27% of seats in the lower house of parliament, and comprised 40% of voters during the 2010 parliamentary elections.<sup>38</sup> The 2004 constitution guarantees that 68 seats in parliament are reserved for women out of 249. It also requires that female politicians fill a quarter of provincial council seats.<sup>39</sup> Although such measures help to address prior gender inequality through

increasing women’s political participation, several challenges remain in terms of democracy and governance. First, the required quota is viewed by some male parliamentarians as undermining the legitimacy of the democratic process, and some oppose the notion. For other officials who support the current system, many continue to perceive the seats as exclusively for “women” or “men,” instead of understanding the fact that women technically can obtain votes for additional seats and increase their



representation. In terms of women’s representation, they currently are disunited along ethnic, tribal, and other identity-based lines and there is an absence of issue-based parties or groups. In this respect, female representation in parliament and the provincial councils is not translating into the development or implementation of policies that advance gender equality. Female parliamentarians often answer to warlords, or prioritize other identities and ties. With the lack of issue-based parties, gender equality as a collective issue will likely not be advanced if divisions continue to exist among female parliamentarians.<sup>40</sup>

Moreover, President Karzai modified the electoral law in 2010 with stipulations that potentially present further obstacles to female candidates seeking office: 1) if a woman’s seat is vacant during a parliamentary or provincial term, male politicians can fill the vacancy if there are no available women, thus rendering it possible for powerful men or warlords to pressure and intimidate women out of their seats; 2) the law increased the required deposit paid by candidates from 10,000 Afs to 30,000 (or 600 American dollars). Given female candidates’ limited employment and economic opportunities, this poses a greater challenge to them. In addition, 3) the law stipulates that teachers should resign from their posts prior to campaigning for public office, and required that the resignation be permanent rather than temporary. For female candidates, many of whom are teachers given limited economic opportunities for women, this disproportionately affects female candidates. Finally, aside from parliament and provincial councils, many local and especially rural women do not have a strong voice in community councils and politics given low literacy and education rates.<sup>41</sup> Even though Afghanistan has one of the highest proportions of female representation in parliament regionally, women continue to be marginalized and excluded from political decision-making in numerous respects.

**Rule of Law and Social Justice**

Rule of law and the court system in Afghanistan continue to be areas marked by stark gender inequality. USIP estimates that 80-90% of all legal cases in Afghanistan are resolved through traditional dispute mechanisms in communities outside of the formal legal system. A key issue is that a high degree of arbitrariness characterizes the rule of law in Afghanistan, especially in Taliban controlled areas, and

women's rights are not necessarily protected.<sup>42</sup> In conflict-prone areas, women and girls are often forcibly exchanged for marriage, a practice known as *baad*, to resolve communal and familial disputes. Even in areas where legal institutions operate without Taliban influence, accessibility remains an issue both for women and girls: there is a dearth of female police officers, lawyers, and judges, and government authorities often fail to implement laws. Oxfam reports that the 2009 Elimination of Violence Against Women is only being actively enforced in 10 provinces out of 34 total. Victims of domestic and gender based violence do have access to 14 safe houses, but four of these are in Kabul and this does not adequately meet the needs of Afghan women nationally.<sup>43</sup> Furthermore, girls and women who flee homes to escape domestic and gender based violence can be criminalized—at present, the incarceration of women for “moral crimes” has led to the imprisonment of at least 700 women and girls.<sup>44</sup>

## Education

### Afghanistan Gender and Education Snapshot

	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010
Expected years of schooling, female		4.80219	4.49747	5.31247	6.06902	5.88606		6.79207	
Expected years of schooling, male		8.86345	11.18074	9.73435	10.63541	10.40112		11.24525	
Primary education, pupils (% female)	30.17938	34.76495	29.1264	35.68696	37.23035	36.89484	37.78309	38.57131	39.34104
Primary education, teachers (% female)						27.69055	28.99976	29.46975	31.00002
Ratio of female to male primary enrollment (%)	46.256	57.003	43.95	59.356	63.464	62.564	64.984	67.194	69.425
Ratio of female to male secondary enrollment (%)		34.909	20.962	32.841	36.652	37.913	43.131	48.875	50.578
School enrollment, primary, female (% gross)	39.70968	61.68585	57.80924	66.38502	72.29404	70.31519	74.15109	73.7849	79.07118
School enrollment, primary, male (% gross)	85.84706	108.2143	131.5337	111.8418	113.9132	112.3894	114.1067	109.8083	113.8941
School enrollment, secondary, female (% gross)		5.97574	5.55012	8.36881	13.57739	13.87229	20.29836	25.77536	30.23415
School enrollment, secondary, female (% net)						13.07625			
School enrollment, secondary, male (% gross)		17.11806	26.47666	25.48265	37.04437	36.58987	47.06267	52.73697	59.77772
School enrollment, secondary, male (% net)						34.30479			
Secondary education, pupils (% female)		24.44685	16.27781	23.36562	25.40252	26.06118	28.63063	31.26018	32.00865
Secondary education, teachers (% female)						27.58631			
Overall Literacy (% of population, aged 15 years and older)						26			
Overall male literacy (% of total)						39			
Overall female literacy (% of total)						12			

Source: World Bank Gender Statistics for Afghanistan, 2011. Literacy data obtained from the National Risk and Vulnerability Assessment 2007-2008.<sup>45</sup>

#### Key issues:

- Women in Afghanistan have long been deprived of education. Their literacy level is one of the lowest compared with other countries. However, there has been improvement over the past several years with Article 44 of the Constitution that legally protects the rights of women to education.
- A deteriorating security situation nation-wide, which has resulted in targeted attacks against educational institutions, especially girls' schools.
- Prevalent local opposition to girls' education for various reasons including: the influence of traditional cultural norms; concerns for girls' safety in light of Taliban and other insurgent attacks against schools, students, and teachers; early and forced marriage as a social practice, and other instances of gender based violence within families and/or communities.
- While there has been some success in recent government initiatives to provide girls with access to education, the 2010 Afghanistan Mortality Survey (AMS) reports that 76% of Afghan women have had no formal education. Women in the South zone (87%) are most likely to have no education, as compared to women who live in the Central (67%) and North (75%) zones. The proportion of women who have no education ranges from a low of 62% in the Capital region to a high of 96% in the South Eastern region.
- Poor educational quality characterized by a shortage of female educators, especially in a cultural environment which tends to proscribe girls and young women from being instructed by male teachers; poor access, namely in rural areas (it is estimated that there are 8,500 schools for 38,000 villages total, and some students will walk 2-3 hours to the closest school).
- Health hazards: it is estimated that only 30% of schools actually consist of completed building structures. In Kabul, 40% of schools are not located in enclosed structures, and the rate for rural schools is far lower.<sup>46</sup>
- Teacher qualifications and female representation remain issues which merit further attention: only 28% of teachers nation-wide are women. The National Education Strategic Plan claims that a mere 22% of teachers meet the minimum qualification of passing grade 14, the last one of secondary school. In a 2005 survey in northern Afghanistan, 200 teachers took the same exam as their students, and only 10 (or 5%) passed.<sup>47</sup>

#### General Overview

Under Taliban rule, Afghanistan's public education system was dismantled, with dire results in terms of gender equality: girls and women were banned from seeking public education and from teaching; boys on the other hand were mainly instructed in a curriculum dictated by a *madrassa* education, emphasizing radical religious content.<sup>48</sup> Prior to 2001, the net enrollment was estimated at 43% for boys and a dismal 3% for

girls—the latter likely deriving from efforts to privately and informally educate girls in households and non-public areas. Moreover, only 21,000 teachers were available during this period, which produced a teacher-student ratio of 1:240 as a national average.

Since the fall of the Taliban, one of the top priorities for the international community, especially donors, has been to pursue gender equality through education. These efforts have produced significant results: at present, 6.7 million children are enrolled in school, one third of them being girls.<sup>49</sup> The rate of enrollment is captured in an impressive 570% growth, translating into an enrollment rate that would have been unimaginable a decade ago. Other results include a seven-fold increase in the number of teachers, and the construction of 4,000 school buildings.<sup>50</sup> Between 2001 and 2008, primary school enrollment overall rose from 0.9 million to over 6 million, with the percentage of girl students increasing from 3 to 35%.<sup>51</sup> Oxfam reports that the number of girls enrolled increased from 5,000 under Taliban rule to a present figure of 2.4 million, and many of those students are now completing primary school.<sup>52</sup>

### **Security Issues**

The United Nations reported in 2008 that at least half the country was excluded from education, however, especially due to concerns with insecurity and poverty; a significant portion of this population were girls and young women.<sup>53</sup> Schools, especially girls' schools, continue to be the center of attacks by insurgents.<sup>5</sup> Between 2004 and 2008, 722 attacks on schools, other educational institutions, staff, teachers, and pupils occurred. A pattern is emerging where attacks seem to have increased in recent years: of the 722 incidents, 230 occurred between July 2007 and June 2008. From April 2008 to January 2009, 138 students and teachers lost their lives and 172 were wounded due to insurgent attacks. 651 schools remained inactive during this time due to insecurity, and 122 school buildings were destroyed by anti-government forces. Girls' schools in particular were targeted: even though they represent 14.8% of the total primary, secondary, and high schools in Afghanistan, they were affected by 50% of the documented incidents.<sup>54</sup> In fact, a CARE report commissioned by the World Bank and referenced by UNHCR, actually provides a higher statistic, claiming that 1,153 attacks on education targets were reported between January 2006 and December 2008, including the damaging and/or destruction of schools by arson, grenades, mines, and rockets; the placing of landmines and other explosives in classrooms, and direct threats to staff, teachers, and students through "night letters," and other means. According to CARE, the number of incidents was stable at 241 and 242 in 2006 and 2007, but dramatically increased to 670 in 2008. In July 2009, more than 400 schools in the southern provinces were closed due to insecurity.<sup>55</sup> It is estimated that 50-80% of schools in conflict affected provinces are closed due to night letters threatening attacks on schools, teachers, or students, acid and poison attacks, and other threats or use of violence by insurgent groups.<sup>56</sup>

### **Other Obstacles**

Poverty, early child marriage and other patterns of gender based violence, and poor education quality are other key factors which pose obstacles to gender equality in Afghanistan. Oxfam in 2011 conducted fieldwork and collected survey responses about education in 17 provinces. Out of the respondents, which included teachers, parents, and students, 41.2% believed that poverty was the largest obstacle to girls' education access, followed by 39.4% naming early or forced marriage, 26.4% citing the lack of available female teachers, and 23.7% claiming that distance or lack of access was a significant obstacle. Of the teachers surveyed, 68.4% reported that their institutions do not have enough trained or available faculty.<sup>57</sup>

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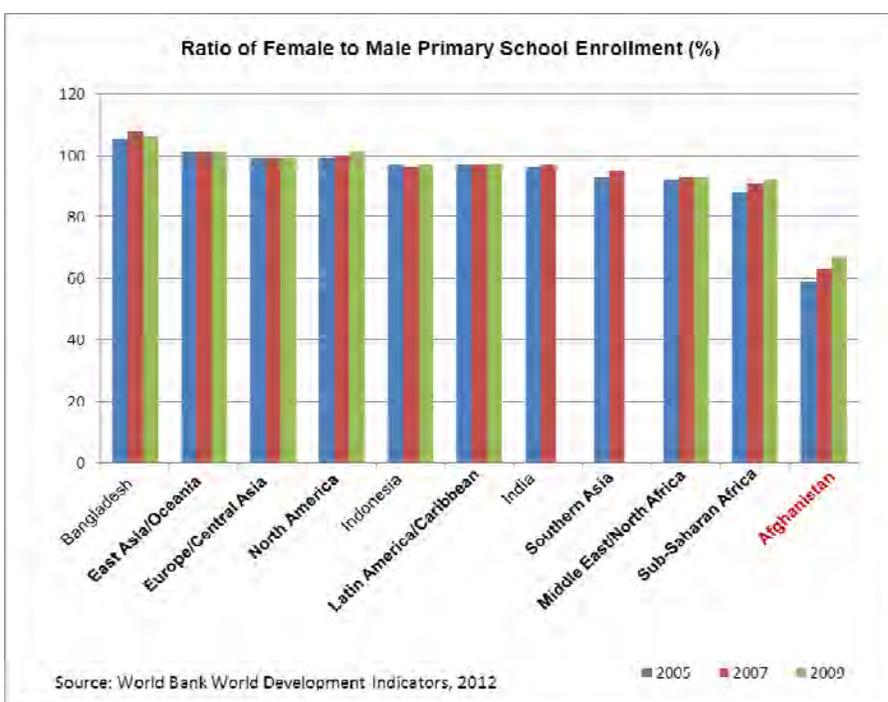
<sup>5</sup> Although analysts often group anti-government elements under the term "Taliban," in reality, anti-government forces include disparate actors such as the Taliban, the Haqqani network, Hezb-i-Islami, and the Jamat Sunat al-Dawa Salafia. This partially explains how locals are able to negotiate with some insurgents to keep schools open, whereas in other communities and regions, other groups have been responsible for targeting schools.

Furthermore, a disparity exists between access for girls in primary as opposed to secondary, high school, and even university level education. While 1.9 million girls are enrolled in primary school, or grades 1-6, the figures are significantly lower for older students: 416,854 are enrolled in secondary school, grades 7-9, and a mere 122,480 in high school, or grades 10-12. The gender gap also increases from 0.63 for primary school students, to 0.48 among secondary school students, and 0.38 for high school attendees. A caveat is that enrollment figures do not necessarily represent actual attendance. Many girls are reported to stay home due to concerns with security, despite their names remaining on official enrollment lists.<sup>58</sup>

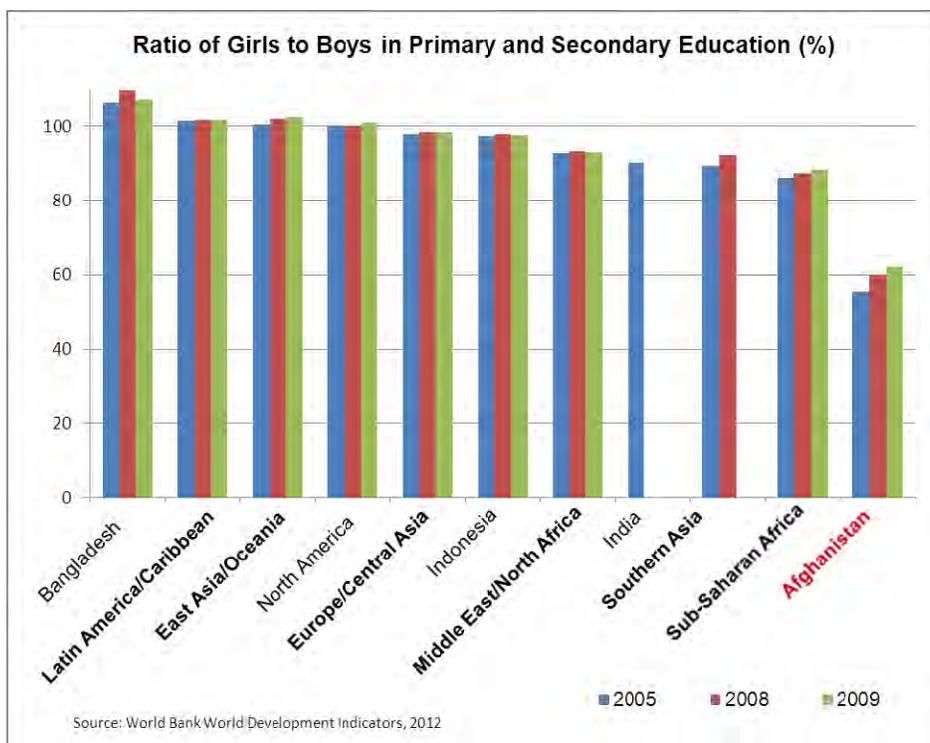
The age disparity is also reflected in the following figures: of Afghan women 25 and older, only 6% have received a formal education, and just 12% of women over the age of 15 are literate. This especially poses problems for women's reproductive and sexual health given that most women of a child-bearing age remain illiterate and uneducated. It is estimated that for every year a girl remains in school, infant mortality drops between 5 to 10%.<sup>59</sup>

### Education Access and Quality

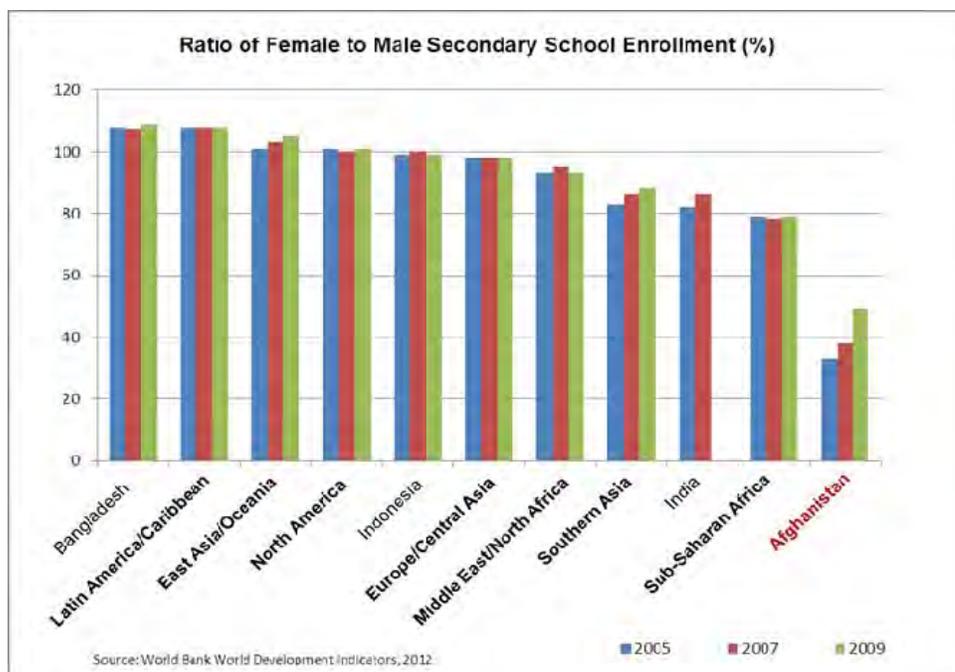
Similar to other regions, donors currently concentrate their programming and funds at the primary level, and



on access versus quality. In addition to the need for teacher training mentioned above, increasing the number of female teachers would not only improve access for girls, especially in a culture where instruction by male teachers is publicly opposed in favor of sex-segregated classrooms, but is also an issue neglected in quality programming sponsored by donors. At present, there continues to be a teacher shortage across the board—even though overall student enrollment increased, for example, from 4.9 to 5.8 million between the years 2004 to 2008, the number of teachers only increased from 121,000 to 142,000. Currently, there are approximately 6.7 million students, and only



149,634 teachers on the government payroll. The teacher-student ratio increased from 1:38 in 2007 to 1:43 in 2009, and this ranges between regions and provinces: in Daikundi, the ratio was 1:97, whereas it was 1:29 in Badakhshan and Baghlan. At present, 30% of all teachers are female, resulting in a ratio of female teachers to female students being 1:53. 80% of these teachers currently work in urban areas, which means girls who reside in rural areas are at a great disadvantage in terms of educational



access. Furthermore, the provision of adequate water and sanitation facilities remains an issue: UNICEF estimates that three out of every four public schools lack safe sanitation, and 40% lack access to clean drinking water.<sup>60</sup> Furthermore, with a focus more on access versus quality, the glaring dynamic of school drop-outs for various reasons is ignored. UNGEI claims that the primary school completion rate for grade 6 is 32% for boys as opposed to 13% for girls. In regards to cohort tracking, only 30% of girls reach grade 5, compared to 56% for boys.<sup>61</sup>

### Early and Child Marriage

Obstacles to girls and women's education should not be viewed merely from the supply side in terms of infrastructure, teachers, and donor programming; the demand side also should be taken into account, or the role that families and communities play as well in hindering gender equality. Early marriage, especially forced and child marriage, continues to prevent numerous girls from attending school. According to the 2003 Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS), the mean age of first marriage for girls was 17 years.<sup>62</sup> UNAMA in 2010 concluded that child marriage, and the selling or exchange of girls to settle communal and inter-familial disputes, was common in all provinces and across all ethnic groups. The same report claims that 57% of all Afghan girls are married before the age of 16, and that 70-80% of marriages are forced, or occur without the consent of both partners.<sup>63</sup> This in and of itself is contributing to one of the world's highest maternal mortality rates, and is one of the leading factors preventing girls from realizing their full potential through education.

### Afghanistan Mortality Survey (AMS) Data (2010)

- "Women in Afghanistan have long been deprived of education. Their literacy level is one of the lowest compared with other countries. However, there has been improvement over the past several years with Article 44 of the Constitution that legally protects the rights of women to education (Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, 2006).
- Survey results show that more than three-quarters (76%) of women have no education. Education decreases with age. Younger women are more likely than older women to be educated, indicating some success in the recent initiatives of the Afghan government to provide girls with access to education. The majority of women in rural areas (83%) have no education; in comparison, half of women in urban areas have some education.
- Women who live in the South zone are most likely to have no education (87 percent) compared with women who live in the Central (67%) and North (75%) zones. The proportion of women who have no education ranges from a low of 62% in the Capital region to a high of 96% in the South Eastern region" (p. 34).

Full survey data is available at: <http://measuredhs.com/pubs/pdf/FR248/FR248.pdf>

## Health

**Table 1: Maternal Mortality Ratio**  
(Modeled Estimate, per 100,000 births)

Country/Region	2000	2005	2008
<b>Afghanistan</b>	1,800	1,500	1,400
<b>Sub-Saharan Africa</b>	800	710	640
<b>Bangladesh</b>	500	420	340
<b>Southern Asia</b>	430	330	290
<b>India</b>	390	280	230
<b>Indonesia</b>	350	270	240
<b>East Asia and Oceania</b>	120	96	84
<b>Middle East/North Africa</b>	110	90	80
<b>Latin America/Caribbean</b>	110	90	85
<b>Europe/Central Asia</b>	29	22	21
<b>North America</b>	13	23	23

**Table 2: Infant Mortality Ratio**  
(Per 1,000 live births)

Country/Region	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010
<b>Afghanistan</b>	103.8	103.8	103.7	103.3	103.2	103
<b>Sub-Saharan Africa</b>	85.5	83.5	81.6	79.8	78	76.4
<b>Southern Asia</b>	58	56.7	55.3	54.1	52.9	51.6
<b>India</b>	54.9	53.5	52.1	50.8	49.5	48.2
<b>Bangladesh</b>	49.1	46.6	44.4	42.2	40	38
<b>Indonesia</b>	32.4	31.3	30.3	29.2	28.1	27.2
<b>Middle East and North Africa</b>	30.5	29.4	28.3	27.4	26.5	25.6
<b>East Asia and Oceania</b>	23.5	22.5	21.6	20.6	19.7	18.8
<b>Latin America and Caribbean</b>	22.4	21.4	20.5	19.5	18.6	18.1
<b>Europe and Central Asia</b>	14.6	14	13.4	12.8	12.3	11.8
<b>North America</b>	6.7	6.6	6.6	6.5	6.5	6.4

Source: World Bank, World Development Indicators 2012

**Table 3: Data from the *Afghanistan Mortality Survey 2010***

Median Age at First Birth for Women Ages 25-49**	20
Median Age of First Marriage for Women Ages 25-49**	17.7
Infant Mortality for Years 2006-2010 (per 1,000 live births) **	65
Under 5 Child Mortality for Years 2006-2010 (per 1,000 live births) **	84
Proportion of pregnancy related deaths to all female deaths, ages 15-19**	32.2
Proportion of pregnancy related deaths to all female deaths, ages 20-24**	46.7
Proportion of pregnancy related deaths to all female deaths, ages 25-29**	51.8
Life expectancy at birth for females (in years)**	64.2
Life expectancy at birth for males (in years) **	63.6

The *Afghanistan Mortality Survey 2010* is accessible at: <http://measuredhs.com/pubs/pdf/FR248/FR248.pdf>

### Key Issues

- The UNDP estimates that Afghanistan's maternal mortality ratio (MMR) is at 1600 per 100,000 live births. Nearly half of all deaths among women of reproductive age are a result of pregnancy and childbirth-related causes, and nearly 75% of these deaths are preventable.
- According to the UNDP, Kabul has an MMR of 400 per 100,000, whereas the rural district of Badakhshan reported an MMR of 6,500 per 100,000 births. The latter is the highest recorded rate globally, and only a few other countries are comparable—Angola with 1700, Malawi with 1800, and Sierra Leone with 2000 deaths per live births. In addition, whereas 52% of mothers in urban locales can seek professional health assistance, only 9% of women in rural areas have this option.<sup>64</sup>
- According to the 2010 Afghanistan Mortality Survey (AMS), between 2003-2010 the country's pregnancy-related mortality rate remained moderately high, at 59%. There were 327 deaths per 100,000 live births during this period, equivalent to 3 deaths per 1,000 live births or 0.3 percent of all live births. This is higher than Nepal (281 deaths per 100,000 live births), Pakistan (297), and Bangladesh (194). Pregnancy-related deaths in Afghanistan accounted for 41% of all deaths to women age 15-49 during this seven year period.
- There are several social conditions which contribute to this high mortality rate, such as: high rates of early marriage, including forced child marriages, a high fertility rate and lack of spacing between frequent births, poor nutrition, the lack of adequate healthcare and medical facilities, especially in rural areas, and the lack of reproductive health education and awareness among both men and women.

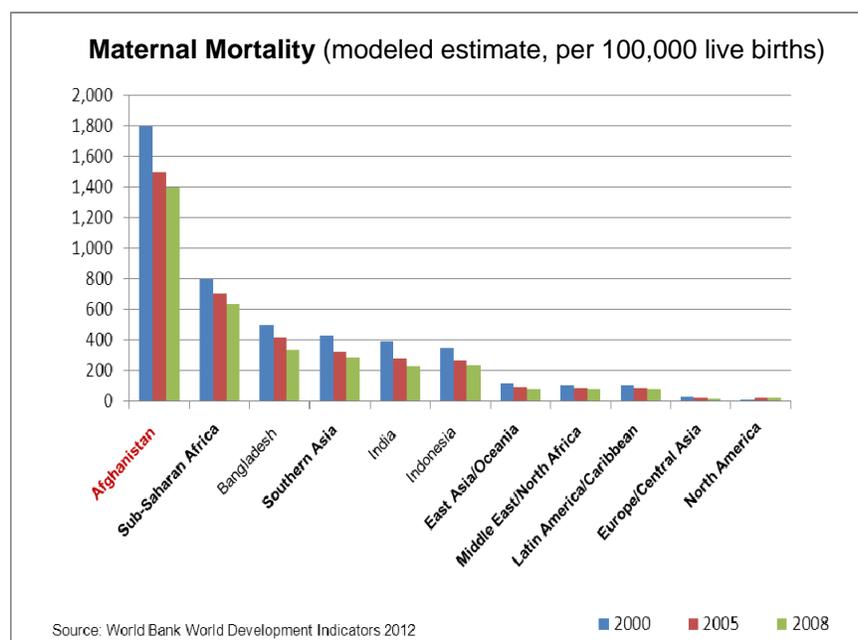
Since the Taliban regime fell in 2001, the government of Afghanistan has been actively involved in expanding primary health care services throughout the country, primarily through contracting local and international NGOs for this purpose. In an environment marred by continued conflict, insecurity, and poverty, the Ministry of Public Health continues to coordinate and manage the health sector, while relying upon NGOs to deliver basic health services, especially in rural areas.<sup>65</sup> This has contributed to the overall expansion of the government sponsored Basic Package of Health Services (BPHS), an effort which has yielded positive results: approximately 85% of the population now reside in districts where such basic services are available. The number of pregnant women receiving prenatal care per year increased from 8,500 in 2003 to 123,000 in 2006. Moreover, the number of facilities which provide trained female health workers increased from 25 to 85%, and more than 10,000 community health workers—half of them women—were trained by NGOs and other international organizations.

Despite modest gains, the overall picture regarding women and girls' health in Afghanistan remains a grave one. Afghanistan continues to have the highest rate of maternal mortality in the world. Every thirty minutes, a woman in Afghanistan dies largely due to preventable reproductive health causes.<sup>66</sup> The UNDP estimates that Afghanistan's maternal mortality ratio (MMR) is at 1600 per 100,000 live births. Nearly half of all deaths among women of reproductive age are a result of pregnancy and childbirth-related causes, and nearly 75% of these deaths are preventable.<sup>67</sup> Afghanistan is comparable in this respect with countries like Chad, Guinea Bissau, Liberia, Mali, Niger, Sierra Leone, and Somalia, places where at least 1 of every 25 women die from complications of childbirth or pregnancy. One of every 10 women in Afghanistan and 1 of every 14 in Somalia and Chad die from reproductive health related causes. During the process of childbirth itself, women especially face particular risks: 1 of every 11 women in Afghanistan and 1 of every 29 in Angola dies during childbirth, in contrast to 1 of every 11,400 in Sweden.<sup>68</sup>

Such sobering statistics are especially captured by extant urban-rural divisions pertaining to women's reproductive health. According to the UNDP, Kabul has an MMR of 400 per 100,000, whereas the rural district of Badakhshan reported an MMR of 6,500 per 100,000 births. The latter is the highest recorded rate globally, and only a few other countries are comparable—Angola with 1700, Malawi with 1800, and Sierra Leone with 2000 deaths per live births. In addition, whereas 52% of mothers in urban locales can seek professional health assistance, only 9% of women in rural areas have this option.<sup>69</sup> It is worth noting that although basic health services have expanded, pre-natal care, maternal health care facilities, and trained female health care personnel are non-existent in many parts of the country, especially in poor rural areas.<sup>70</sup> Key causes of maternal mortality in Afghanistan include hemorrhage (24%) and obstructed labor (32%). Furthermore, the extremely high rate of anemia among women (recorded by MICS2000 at 55-91% in the Southern and Eastern regions) along with poor nutritional health, and the lack of clean sanitation and water contributes to this rate. Only 27% of Afghans currently have access to safe drinking water and 5% to adequate sanitation.<sup>71</sup>

### **Maternal Mortality**

The MMR is also exacerbated by the fact that 90% of women give birth at home, where professional health and medical assistance is absent. Where primary health care clinics are available, 70% do not provide adequate mother and child services, and 90% of hospitals do not have the equipment needed to perform C-sections. Extant gender norms and stigmas attached to women seeking treatment by male health care workers also contributes to this dynamic, especially given the fact that as reported in 2002, 40% of health facilities did not have female workers, only 24% had

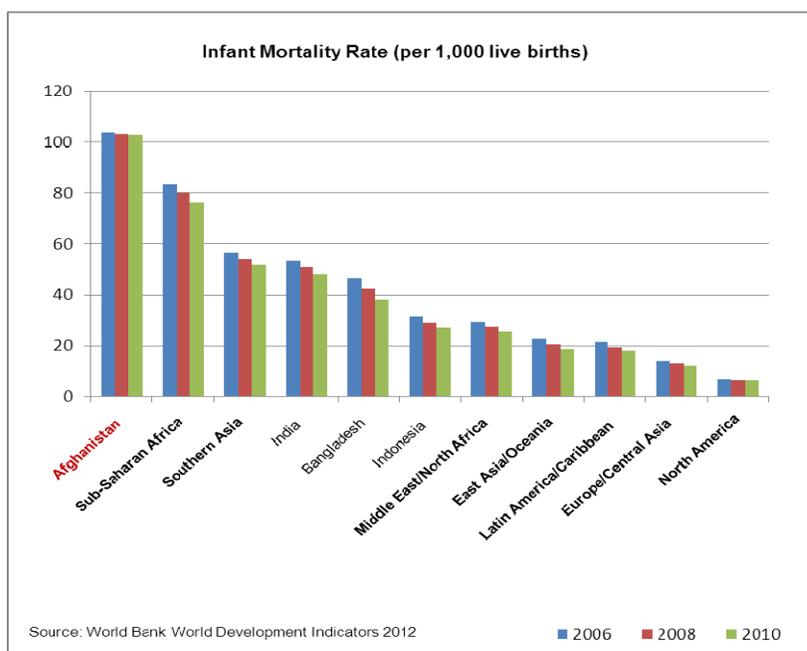


one female physician, and 21% had at least one female nurse. Although the situation has slightly improved as mentioned above, for the most part, women, especially from rural and poor areas, are either reluctant to seek reproductive health services due to the unavailability of female workers, or are unable due to geographic isolation and logistical difficulties for travel. Regional differences also exist in this respect: health care still remains primarily concentrated in urban centers such as Kabul. The World Bank reported in 2005 that more than half of all hospitals in Afghanistan were located in Kabul, serving a mere one fifth of the population. The WHO that year documented that of the 3,900 physicians and 990 midwives offering services nationally, 2,700 physicians and 600 midwives worked in Kabul.<sup>72</sup>

Generally speaking, there are several social conditions which contribute to this high mortality rate, such as: high rates of early marriage, including forced child marriages, a high fertility rate and lack of spacing between frequent births, poor nutrition, the lack of adequate healthcare and medical facilities, especially in rural areas, and the lack of reproductive health education and awareness among both men and women.<sup>73</sup>

### Gender Based Violence

Key contributors to Afghanistan's high MMR are traditional practices which perpetuate gender based violence against girls and women. Such practices include forced and child marriage, the exchange or selling of girls for marriage (*baad* and *baadal*) to settle local and communal disputes, forced isolation in the home, "honor killings," the forced marriage of widows to relatives of deceased husbands, and recurrent domestic violence by partners, in-laws, and other familial members. In field research conducted in 29 of 34 provinces in 2010, UNAMA Human Rights confirmed that such practices are common in all communities, urban and rural regions, and among all ethnic groups. The same report also claims that half of all Afghan girls are married before the age of 15, and by extension, that 70-80% of marriages are forced, or occur without the consent of both partners.<sup>74</sup> UNIFEM and the Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission also claim that approximately 57% of Afghan marriages are child marriages, defined as the situation where one partner is under the age of 16. In a study of 200 underage married girls, it was found that 40% were married between 10-13 years of age, 32.5% at 14 years, and 27.5% at 15 years.<sup>75</sup>



The prevalence of forced child marriage has largely contributed to the staggering MMR given that such girls are often not provided with a basic education in sexual and reproductive health, are not physically or emotionally prepared for the tasks of raising children or of marital life, and are often more susceptible to domestic violence, marital rape, and sexual assault in light of sharp age differences with their spouses, who, in some cases, are four to five decades older. Moreover, given that *baad* marriages are perpetuated to resolve communal disputes, the new husband's family often treats the girl or woman as "property," and even as servants or house slaves. Girls in this position often experience physical and emotional violence, abuse, and humiliation in response to the crimes committed by male family members. *Baad* brides are also stigmatized by their families and communities.<sup>76</sup> Amidst widespread poverty and highly insecure environments producing communal feuds and disputes, the "selling" of girls to older men will likely continue to occur, especially to settle family and tribal debts, without further interventions and development programming.

The health implications of such practices are extremely detrimental, especially for Afghanistan's high MMR. Gynecological complications that emerge from early sex and childbirth can include vaginal laceration, ruptured uterus, and urethra-vaginal fistula. In addition to this, girls who become pregnant before the age of

15 are five times more likely to die due to maternal causes related to pregnancy and childbirth than women in their 20s. Children born to girls under 18 years of age are reported to have a 60% greater chance of dying in their first year of life. With a high MMR, this phenomenon accounts for ten times more deaths—24,000 annually—than conflict-related civilian deaths in Afghanistan.<sup>77</sup>

#### **Afghanistan Mortality Survey Data (AMS) (2010)**

- According to the AMS: “The level of pregnancy-related mortality in Afghanistan in the seven years preceding the AMS 2010 is moderately high. Respondents reported 256 pregnancy-related deaths in the seven years preceding the survey. The pregnancy-related mortality rate, which is the annual number of pregnancy-related deaths per 1,000 women-years of exposure, was 0.59, and pregnancy-related deaths accounted for 41 percent of all deaths to women age 15-49 in the seven years preceding the survey.” (p. 127)
- “The pregnancy-related mortality ratio for Afghanistan is 327 deaths per 100,000 live births for the seven-year period before the survey. This estimate is equivalent to 3 deaths per 1,000 live births or 0.3 percent of all live births.” (p. 128).
- “The pregnancy-related mortality ratio for Afghanistan (327) is higher than the ratio of 281 for Nepal estimated from the 2006 Nepal DHS (MoPH and MI, 2007), the ratio of 297 for Pakistan estimated from the 2006/7 Pakistan DHS (NIPS and MI, 2008), and the ratio of 194 for Bangladesh estimated from the 2010 Bangladesh Maternal Mortality and Health Care Survey” (p. 130).

Full survey data is available at: <http://measuredhs.com/pubs/pdf/FR248/FR248.pdf>

## Environment and Energy

### *Key Issues*

- Women throughout the developing world are disproportionately vulnerable to the effects of climate change. The Maplecroft Climate Change Vulnerability Index, which analyzes and maps countries' ability to adapt to climate change, categorizes Afghanistan as a higher risk, as are Pakistan, India, Indonesia, and Bangladesh.
- Water scarcity, as a result of drought, is the most adverse impact of climate change in Afghanistan. Last year, poor rains negatively impacted 14 drought-laden provinces, where families have been unable to grow enough wheat to feed themselves. Female-headed households are especially at risk.
- As a result of decades of conflict, poverty, climate change, and population growth, Afghanistan's environment and natural resource base is under severe pressure. Given women's integral role in the country's agricultural sector (44% are employed in it), as well as their lack of access to and control over resources, they are especially vulnerable to natural resource degradation and other environmental shocks.
- Afghan women's use of tandoors for cooking and heating exposes them (and children) to health-damaging pollutants. Afghanistan is one of the top 10 countries with the most serious health and environmental problems related to cook stoves.
- Increased deforestation has led to an acute shortage of firewood. Since women and girls customarily are responsible for collecting firewood, they are having a more difficult time meeting household energy needs.
- Afghan women constitute half of the country's population, yet they are under-represented in all decision making bodies, including those with a focus on environmental protection. One woman, Dr. Habiba Sarabi, has become a positive role model for local communities. Since creating Afghanistan's first national park, Band-e Amir, Dr. Sarabi is helping to reverse environmental damage that decades of war have left on the country's land and waterways.

"Women and the environment is one of the 12 critical areas of concern for achieving gender equality identified by the Beijing Platform for Action in 1995. The Platform for Action recognizes that environmental conditions have a different impact on the lives of women and men due to existing gender inequality. In particular, lack of access to clean water and energy, environmental degradation, and natural disasters disproportionately affect women in terms of health, unremunerated work and well-being."<sup>78</sup>

When considering gender aspects of the environment, new issues and trends are emerging - including the impacts of environmental change (including climate change), environmental health, conflict and environment, and urbanization. New institutional challenges such as ensuring women's land/water rights, as well as intellectual property rights and a human rights approach to gender aspects of environment are becoming more visible. Lack of research, information, and data, however, highlight the need for greater attention.<sup>f</sup>

### **Climate Change:**

Women throughout the developing world are disproportionately vulnerable to the effects of climate change, particularly where their rights and socio-economic status are not equal to men's, and where they are not adequately engaged in policymaking with regard to climate. In spite of their subordinate social position, however, women are on the front lines of the struggle for survival as climate change threatens further desertification and land degradation. Their responsibilities in households and communities, as well as stewardship of natural resources enable women to create strategies for adapting to shifts in environmental realities. The World Bank reports, "there are countless examples where empowering women to exercise leadership within their communities contributes to climate resilience, ranging from disaster preparedness in Bangladesh, Indonesia and Nicaragua, to better forest governance in India and Nepal, to coping with drought in the Horn of Africa."<sup>79</sup> Thus, women play a key role in adaptation and mitigation to climate change.

The most adverse impact of *climate change* in Afghanistan is drought. Currently the country faces water scarcity as a result of decades of war, which destroyed water infrastructure, and climatic issues that affect two vital livelihood strategies – agriculture and livestock. Poor rains earlier in 2011 have negatively impacted 14 drought-affected provinces, where families have not been able to grow enough wheat to feed themselves this past winter.<sup>80</sup>

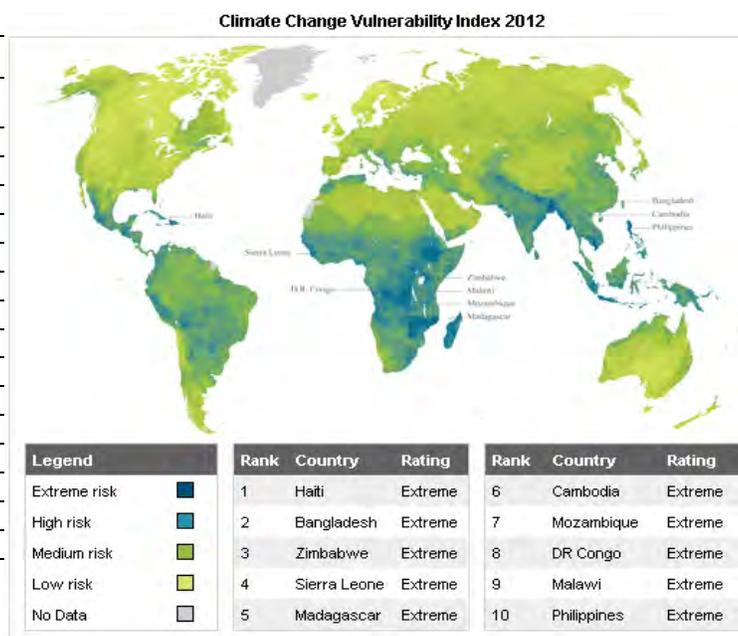
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<sup>f</sup> Note: gender-disaggregated data for environment, water, and energy indicators have not yet been developed.

As crops are devastated and food prices soar, the worsened economy has led to greater instances of food insecurity. Afghan female-headed households are especially vulnerable. Malnutrition impacts children and nursing mothers, who are unable to produce nutritive milk. [For more information on gender and water, see the next overview on Water and Sanitation]

2012 Climate Change Vulnerability Index <sup>g</sup>		
	Score	Rank (out of 193 countries)
Haiti	0.16	1
Bangladesh	0.20	2
Indonesia	2.25	27
India	2.27	28
<b>Southern Asia</b>	<b>2.81</b>	--
Pakistan	2.98	35
<b>Afghanistan</b>	<b>3.20</b>	<b>38</b>
<b>Southeastern Asia</b>	<b>3.49</b>	--
<b>Latin America/Caribbean</b>	<b>5.61</b>	--
<b>Central Asia/ Eastern Europe</b>	<b>8.43</b>	--
<b>Europe</b>	<b>8.68</b>	--
Kazakhstan	9.00	152
United States of America	9.11	160
<b>Northern America</b>	<b>9.22</b>	--
Iceland	9.96	193

Note: Values closer to 0 represent higher risk and values closer to 10 represent lower risk. Source: Maplecroft



Afghanistan ranks fairly low in the 2012 Maplecroft *Climate Change Vulnerability Index* (38<sup>th</sup> out of 193 countries), which evaluates vulnerability of human populations to extreme climate related events and changes. The CCVI classifies the country as a 'high risk,' as compared to 30 other nations it deems 'extreme risk.' Top 10 from the latter are: Haiti, Bangladesh, Sierra Leone, Zimbabwe, Madagascar, Cambodia, Mozambique, DR Congo, Malawi, and Philippines. In terms of *Adaptive Capacity*,<sup>h</sup> which measures a country's government and institutional ability to adapt and take advantage of future environmental or regulatory conditions, Afghanistan ranks lowest in the world, with a score of 1.72 (Southern Asia average: 3.37).

### Natural Resources

On a daily basis, women around the world manage natural resources in their roles as farmers and household providers. Yet, they have less access to and control over natural resources than their male counterparts. As FAO reports, "it is men who put land, water, plants and animals to commercial use, which is often more valued than women's domestic uses."<sup>81</sup> Afghanistan's environment and natural resource base is under severe pressure, caused by decades of conflict, continuing instability, poverty, climate change (i.e., prolonged drought), and population growth. Natural resource degradation is a crucial issue, as 80% of the country's population depends on natural resources for their livelihoods.<sup>82</sup> Droughts and desertification brought on by climate change could disrupt Afghanistan's agricultural production, including a reduction in the number and value of livestock, as well as increased conflict within communities. Given women's integral role in the country's agricultural sector (44% are employed in it), as well as their lack of access to and control over resources, they are especially vulnerable to natural resource degradation and other environmental shocks. Afghan women are doubly impacted by environmental hazards as compared to men – first, as a result of female propensity towards poverty; and second, based on their role and status within the country's patriarchal society.

<sup>g</sup> Maplecroft's CCVI combines the risk of exposure to extreme events, with the degree of current sensitivity to that exposure and the ability of the country to adjust to, or take advantage of stresses resulting from climate change. Source: *Climate Change and Environmental Risk Atlas 2012*. <http://www.maplecroft.com>

<sup>h</sup> Maplecroft's *Adaptive Capacity Index* measures the potential ability of a country to adapt and take advantage of future environmental or regulatory conditions. This includes the ability of a country to modify its exposure to risks and to absorb and recover from losses stemming from climate change.

## Clean Household Energy

Lack of access to clean energy fuels and improved cook stoves in sub-Saharan Africa and parts of South Asia continue to have major health impacts (see table below). Epidemiological studies link exposure to air pollution from indoor cook stoves with at least four major illnesses: acute respiratory infections (ARI), lung cancer, chronic obstructive lung diseases such as asthma and bronchitis, and birth defects.<sup>83</sup> In 2004, nearly 2 million deaths were attributed to indoor smoke from using solid fuels,<sup>84</sup> such as biomass (wood, animal dung, crop waste) and coal.

Afghan women use *tandoors*,

drum-shaped ovens used for cooking and heating. Such cook stoves produce high levels of indoor air pollution with a range of health-damaging pollutants, including small soot particles that penetrate deep into the lungs. Exposure is particularly high among women and young children, due to the fact that they are traditionally responsible for household chores and spend more time at home, working in the kitchen. According to UNEP, Afghanistan is one of the top 10 countries with the most serious health and environmental problems related to cook stoves.<sup>85</sup> The WHO estimates that over 95% of the country's population burn wood and other solid fuels in their homes.<sup>86</sup> Afghan women preparing family meals burn wood or other organic fuels, which exposes them to dangerous levels of smoke for prolonged periods of time.<sup>1</sup>

Firewood is the primary source of household energy in Afghanistan; however, increased deforestation (estimated at 30,000 hectares annually, primarily due to illegal logging and government mismanagement)<sup>87</sup> is causing an acute shortage of firewood for families. Barely 1.5% of the country's land is now covered with trees. Since Afghan women and girls are traditionally responsible for collecting firewood, they are having a more difficult time meeting household energy needs.

## Environmental Leadership

A rights-based approach provides a constructive basis for examining the connection between vulnerability and adaptive capacity to climate change. Adaptation initiatives that do not consider gender differences are at risk of implementing measures that may aggravate rather than decrease vulnerability. Throughout the world, women's participation and empowerment within the environment sector, and climate change in particular, remains limited. Involvement of local women's organizations in adaptation planning and programming, for instance, is often restricted because many organizations lack general and scientific information on climate change; as well, there are limited opportunities available to help them connect with other civil society organizations dedicated to reducing the impacts of and adapting to climate change.<sup>88</sup>

Afghan women constitute half of the country's population, yet they continue to be under-represented in all decision making bodies. Despite this, women have proven to be highly effective agents of change. For instance, Dr. Habiba Sarabi, who became Afghanistan's first female governor (Bamyan Province) in 2005, is helping to reverse environmental damage that decades of war have left on the country's land and waterways. She created Afghanistan's first national park, Band-e Amir, a 220 square mile area with lakes and limestone canyons. Sarabi's strong position on environmental issues has made her a positive role model for local

Relative Risk for Health Outcomes from Exposure to Solid Fuel Smoke			
Strength of Evidence	Health Outcome	Sex and Age Group	Relative Risk
<b>Strong Evidence</b>			
	Acute lower respiratory infection	Children <5	2.3
	Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease	Women ≥ 30	3.2
	Lung cancer (from exposure to coal smoke)	Women ≥ 30	1.9
<b>Strong Evidence for specific groups only</b>			
	Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease	Men ≥ 30	1.8
	Lung cancer (from exposure to coal smoke)	Men ≥ 30	1.5
<b>Limited Evidence</b>			
	Lung cancer (from exposure to biomass smoke)	Women ≥ 30	1.5
	Asthma	Children 5-14	1.6
	Asthma	All ≥ 15	1.2
	Cataracts	All ≥ 15	1.3
	Tuberculosis	All ≥ 15	1.5
<p>Source: Desai et al. 2004. Indoor Smoke from Solid Fuels: Assessing the Environmental Burden of Disease at National and Local Levels. World Health Organization. Environmental Burden of Disease Series, No. 4.  <a href="http://www.who.int/quantifying_ehimpacts/publications/en/Indoorsmoke.pdf">http://www.who.int/quantifying_ehimpacts/publications/en/Indoorsmoke.pdf</a>            Note: Relative risk is defined as the probability of the health outcome in the population exposed to smoke from solid fuels relative to the probability of the health outcome in the population not exposed to smoke from solid fuels. For confidence interval values of the relative risk of health outcomes shown, see Desai et al. (2004).</p>			

<sup>i</sup> A recent WHO study found that inhaling smoke from indoor heating and cooking kills about 54,000 Afghans per year. Regularly breathing smoke also leads to childhood pneumonia, lung cancer and other cardiovascular diseases. Source: UN News Centre. February 2012. UN-supported project brings Afghans one step closer to cleaner cooking stoves. <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=41405&Cr=energy&Cr1>

communities. She successfully convinced village elders and district committees – dominated by men -- that Bamyan can prosper through eco-tourism. Called the “first lady of the environment,” Sarabi chairs the Band-e Amir Protected Area Committee, which is made up of village representatives who decide on environmental policies and plan education projects for local citizens and park tourists.<sup>89</sup>

## Water and Sanitation

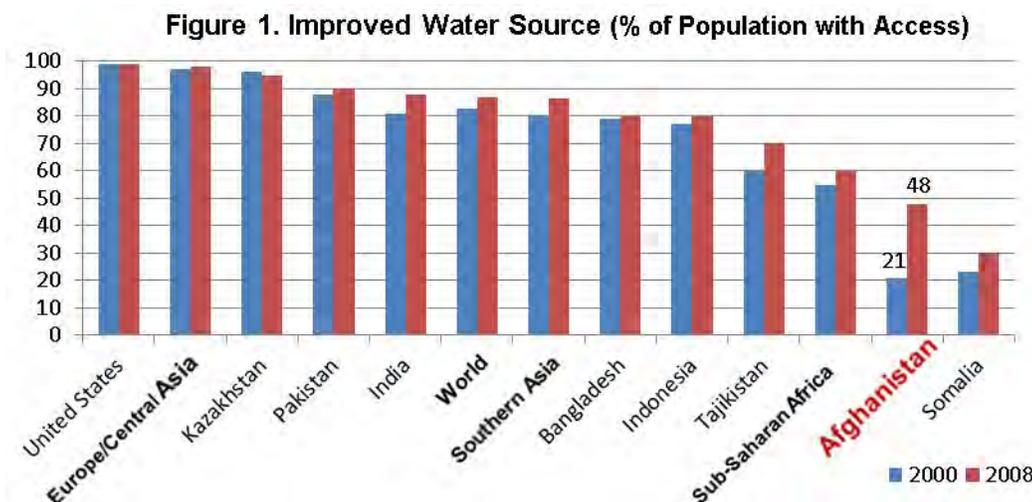
<b>Afghanistan Gender and Water/Sanitation Snapshot</b>		
	<b>2000</b>	<b>2008</b>
<b>Improved Water Source</b> (% of Population with Access)	21	48
<b>Improved Sanitation Facilities</b> (% of Population with Access)	32	37
<b>Average Time Needed to Collect Water Per Trip to the Source of Drinking Water. 2005-2007</b>		
<b>Asia:</b>		
National Areas	21 minutes	
Urban Areas	27 minutes	
Rural Areas	23 minutes	

### **Key Issues**

- Access to clean drinking water is a significant problem in Afghanistan. The only other country in the world with less access to improved water source is Somalia. Afghan women, in particular, feel the greatest impact by the lack of water, inadequate sanitation and low levels of hygiene, but are rarely involved in water systems management.
  - According to the 2010 Afghanistan Mortality Survey (AMS), however, access to safe drinking water has increased recently. Just over one in two Afghan households obtain drinking water from an improved source, with three-quarters of urban households and half of rural households having access to safe drinking water.
  - Nevertheless, the country has a long way to go in improving sanitation. Based on AMS data, only one-fifth of households have an improved toilet facility, whereas four-fifths have a non-improved toilet facility and one-fifth have no toilet facility at all.
- In 2009, 75% of Afghanistan's schools did not have safe sanitation facilities and only 60% had water,<sup>a</sup> which greatly impacts Afghan girls' ability to attend school.
- Afghan women and children (mostly girls under the age of 15) are predominantly responsible for collecting their families' water each day. This time-consuming activity also prevents girls from attending school, and it restricts women's ability to engage in productive employment. In Kuchi, women spend about 40 minutes per day collecting water. In other provinces, the time needed is higher – in Badghis, women spend 2+ hours/day obtaining water.
- Afghan women and girls also face unsafe conditions when traveling outside their hometown to collect water.
- Afghan female-headed households – on the rise – are less likely to be able to afford water; cultural perceptions also prevent them from accessing public sanitation sites.
- Water availability is closely linked to food security. Crop failures, devastation of livestock and severe shortages of drinking water put much of the Afghan rural population at risk of starvation. Women farmers, in particular, are impacted by water.

### **Access to Improved Water**

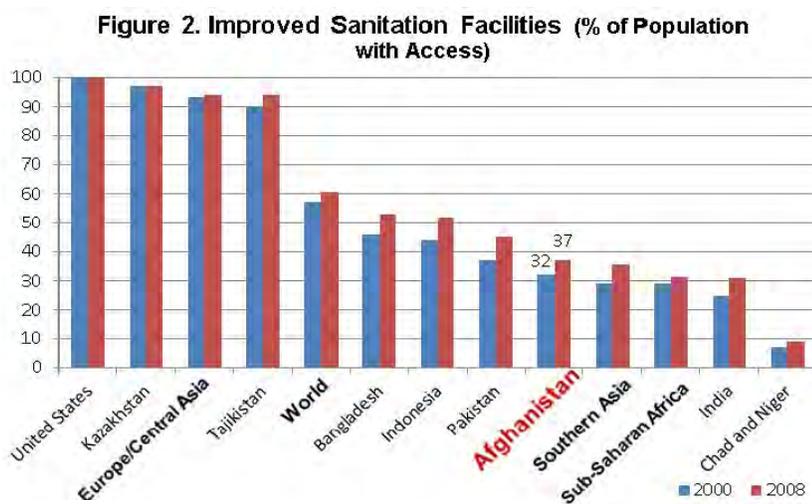
Throughout the developing world, access to water remains an issue with a significant gender component. More often than not, it is women and girls who are responsible for collecting water for their households. Investment in infrastructure to reduce women's and girls' time burdens in water (and firewood) collection is identified by the Millennium Development Goal (MDG) Task Force on Education and Gender Equality as a strategic priority.<sup>90</sup> As well, women continue to make major contributions in agriculture and livestock production. Improved water management, especially irrigation, is critical to higher agricultural productivity.



Source: World Bank, World Development Indicators

Access to improved water infrastructure in Afghanistan is among the lowest in the world.<sup>j</sup> Illnesses caused by unclean drinking water, such as diarrheal diseases and tuberculosis, are common. In 2006, it was estimated that one in eight Afghan children died from drinking contaminated water.<sup>91</sup> A recent study highlights that *all* Afghan citizens – both poor and non-poor – deal with unreliable access to safe water.<sup>92</sup> Afghan women, in particular, feel the greatest impact by the lack of water, inadequate sanitation, and low levels of hygiene, and they are rarely involved in water systems management.<sup>93</sup> Their needs and opinions are often overlooked.<sup>94</sup>

Although access to improved drinking water is increasing at the world level, some regions are still lagging behind – primarily Sub-Saharan Africa – as depicted in Figure 1 above. Afghanistan is trailing, as well, with only 48% of its population accessing an improved water source. Despite the fact that it more than doubled access between 2000 and 2008, Afghanistan remains well below both the world average and that of Southern Asia, both at 87%. India (88%), Bangladesh (80%), and Indonesia (80%) all have better access to water than Afghanistan. The only country with less access to water is Somalia, at 30%. Based on 2008 data (not shown in Figure 1), rural Afghans have even less access to water than their urban counterparts (39% versus 48%); however, rural areas did see a marked improvement from 2000, when only 17% had access.



Source: World Bank, World Development Indicators

### Access to Improved Sanitation

As shown in Figure 2 above, 61% of the world's people had access to improved sanitation facilities in 2008. Regions with the poorest access are Sub-Saharan Africa (31%) and Southern Asia (36%). Afghanistan is only marginally better than Southern Asia overall, with 37% of its citizens accessing improved sanitation. Neighboring Kazakhstan (97%) and Tajikistan (94%), on par with the U.S., have a solid lead over Afghanistan, as do Bangladesh (53%), Indonesia (52%), and Pakistan (45%). India (31%) is slightly worse off. Chad and Niger

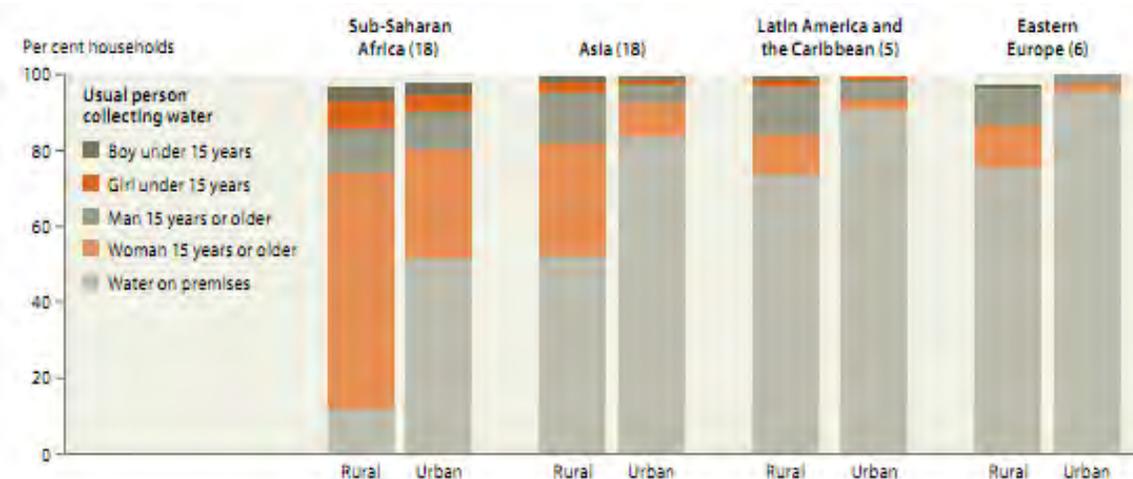
<sup>j</sup> The featured statistic – Access to Improved Water Source – refers to the percentage of the population who use any of the following types of water supply for drinking: piped water, public tap, borehole or pump, protected well, protected spring or rainwater.

(both at 9%) have the world's worst sanitation usage, substantially behind Afghanistan. In 2009, UNICEF reported that 75% of Afghanistan's schools did not have safe sanitation facilities, and only 60% had water,<sup>95</sup> which greatly impacts Afghan girls' ability to attend school.

### Water Collection

As Figure 3 below indicates, women in Sub-Saharan Africa and Asia bear the brunt of responsibility for water collection. This is the case in Afghanistan, as well, where women and children (mostly girls under the age of 15) are predominantly responsible for this daily activity.

**Figure 3. Distribution of Households by Person Responsible for Water collection, by Region and Urban/Rural Areas, 2005-2007**



S

Source: United Nations Statistics Division, based on data from Macro International, Demographic and Health Survey (DHS) reports (2009) and UNICEF, Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS) reports (2009).

The time involved in trekking back and forth to a water source can be significant, as seen in Figure 4 below. Typically, more than one trip per day may be needed to cover household needs, and this restricts the amount of time women can spend on other activities, including income-generating, educational, and leisure. It can prevent girls from attending school. For women, the time spent collecting water restricts the number of days spent in productive employment.<sup>96</sup> In Sub-Saharan Africa, for instance, it takes an average of 34 minutes per trip – in rural areas in Somalia and Mauritania, that figure is 80+ minutes.<sup>97</sup>

<b>Figure 4. Average Time (in minutes) Needed to Collect Water Per Trip to the Source of Drinking Water, by Region and Rural/Urban Areas, 2005-2007</b>				
	<b>Sub-Saharan Africa (13)</b>	<b>Asia (13)</b>	<b>Latin America and the Caribbean (4)</b>	<b>Eastern Europe (7)</b>
National Level	34	21	17	15
Urban Areas	25	17	19	20
Rural Areas	36	23	17	13

Source: Computed by the United Nations Statistics Division based on data from Macro International, Demographic and Health Survey (DHS) reports (2009) and UNICEF, Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS) reports (2009).  
Note: Unweighted averages; the numbers in brackets indicate the number of countries averaged. Time needed to collect water is measured as the time spent in one trip to go to the source of drinking water, get water and return home.

Data from a household survey conducted in 2009 across 29 provinces in Afghanistan indicate that women and girls spend a great deal of time collecting water. In Kuchi, for women spend about 40 minutes per day. In other provinces, the number increases – in Badghis, some women report spending 2+ hours/day obtaining water. Afghan women and girls also face unsafe conditions when traveling outside their hometown to collect water.<sup>98</sup>

### **Female-headed Households**

Female-headed households – on the rise in Afghanistan – are much less likely to be able to afford water, and cultural perceptions can prevent them from accessing public sanitation sites.<sup>99</sup> In addition, the average Afghan widow, with 4+ children, spends a substantial amount of time fetching water, which reduces her ability to partake in income-generating activities that support her family. As a result, Afghan widows are more than twice as likely to suffer from malnutrition as other women. In addition, children of widow-headed households are five times as likely to be undernourished and to suffer from diarrhea or water-borne disease.<sup>100</sup>

### **Water and Food Security**

In Afghanistan, water availability also is closely linked to food security. Crop failures, devastation of livestock and severe shortages of drinking water have put much of the Afghan rural population at risk of starvation. Women farmers, in particular, are impacted by water. FAO reports “they have limited access to irrigation networks or, when they do, to irrigation management decisions: membership of water users’ associations is often linked to land ownership. Women’s limited water entitlements force them to use subsistence agricultural practices that may lead to soil erosion, a major source of instability in watersheds.”<sup>101</sup>

#### **Afghanistan Mortality Survey (AMS) Data (2010)**

- “Access to safe drinking water has increased recently. Just over one in two households obtain drinking water from an improved source, with three-quarters of urban households and half of rural households having access to safe drinking water. However, the country has a long way to go in improving sanitation. Only one-fifth of households have an improved toilet facility, while four-fifths have a non-improved toilet facility and one-fifth have no toilet facility at all. Less than half of households are electrified” (p. 36)

Full survey data is available at: <http://measuredhs.com/pubs/pdf/FR248/FR248.pdf>

## Information and Communication Technology

<i>Afghanistan Gender and ICT Snapshot</i>					
	2000	2005	2008	2009	2010
Mobile Gender Gap				78%	
Cellular mobile subscribers per 100 inhabitants	.	4.02	.	42.63	41.39
Female Mobile Phone Subscribers (in thousands)				1,329	
Male Mobile Phone Subscribers (in thousands)				6,488.7	
Female Mobile Phone Penetration				10%	
Male Mobile Phone Penetration				45%	
Main telephone lines per 100 inhabitants	.	.33	.37	.46	.45
Personal computers per 100 population	.	.4	.	.	.
Internet subscribers per 100 inhabitants	.	.	0.20	0.0	.
Internet users per 100 inhabitants		.10	1.90	3.55	4.00

Sources: International Telecommunication Union, World Telecommunication/ICT Indicators Database; GSMA and Vital Wave (2009)

### **Key Issues**

- In general, the Information and Communication Technology (ICT) sector in Afghanistan, including the use of computers and mobile phones, is dominated by men. Social and cultural obstacles prevent women from using these technologies, as do limited Internet access and low rates of computer literacy and ownership.
- Nonetheless, Afghan women are interested in ICT and its applications. Female students comprise at least 36% of each graduating class from Kabul University's Computer Science Department.
- The Mobile Gender Gap is significant in Afghanistan, where women are 78% less likely to own a phone than their male counterparts.
- Afghan men typically view the main reason for a woman to have a mobile phone as a connection between herself and her family, or her workplace. Use outside this circle is often viewed with suspicion.
- The price of Internet service in Afghanistan remains high; therefore the Internet is only accessible to a small segment of the population. Most Afghans go to Internet cafés and public computer centers. Women are either barred from entering these facilities, or may face harassment from men.
- In early March 2012, the country's first female-only Internet café was opened in Kabul, creating a safe environment for women.

After years of conflict, innovative methods are needed to restructure Afghanistan's economic and social spheres. Much of the country's ICT infrastructure was destroyed due to the war. ICT is recognized as an important aspect of ensuring improvements in the country's workforce development and education sector, in particular.<sup>102</sup> A 2010 report from Price Waterhouse Coopers states: "The successful implementation of ICT can help to promote national goals, achieve a tolerant socioeconomic atmosphere in Afghanistan. It can also support the governmental policies of rebuilding social welfare, generating employment, establishing a dynamic and growing private sector, eradicating poverty, and initiate programs and policies for the emancipation of the under privileged groups. Building communications infrastructure has been the prerogative of these policies."<sup>103</sup>

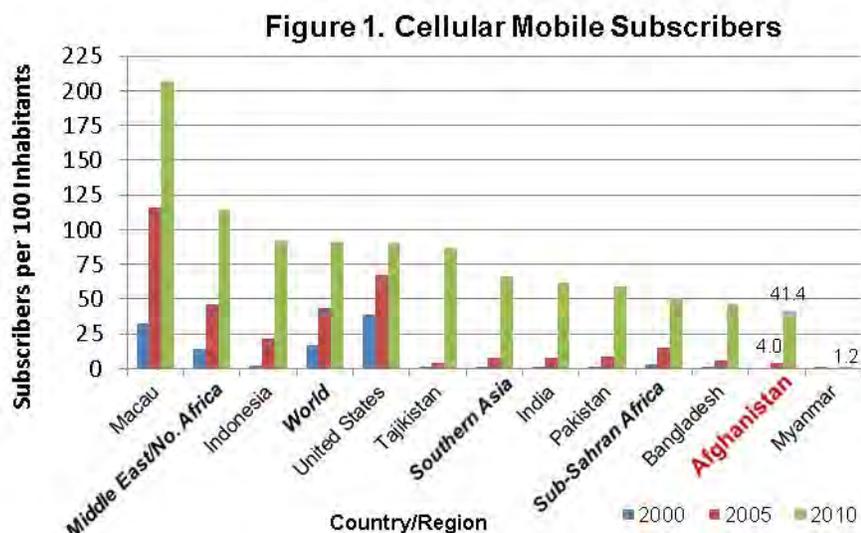
Currently, the ICT sector in Afghanistan, and the use of computers, in general, is dominated by men. A variety of social and cultural obstacles prevent women from using these technologies, as do limited Internet access and low rates of computer literacy and ownership. Thus, Afghan women continue to lack access to new technologies and innovative communication tools, which significantly inhibits progress towards gender equality.

### **Women in Computer Science**

Afghan women are interested in ICT and its applications, which is reflected in the number of female students studying courses related to computer science and information technology. For instance, women comprise at least 36% of each graduating class from Kabul University's Computer Science Department.<sup>104</sup> This is significant because, in 2007, women comprised only 25% of the university's total population. In contrast, in the U.S., women comprise over 50% of university populations, but only 25% graduate from computer science programs. Thus the number of U.S. women in computer science is 50% below the overall university rate, whereas at Kabul University, it is 50% above the university rate.<sup>105</sup>

## Mobile Phones

A decade ago, mobile phone usage in Afghanistan was almost nonexistent. By 2004, the number of subscribers grew to 600,000. By 2010, this number grew exponentially, to 13 million. According to the *Afghanistan Mortality Survey 2010*, 71% of households,<sup>k</sup> and 74% of the country's total population, have a mobile phone.<sup>106</sup> The annual growth rate of mobile phone subscriptions in Afghanistan is estimated to be 53%.<sup>107</sup> However, as indicated in Figure 1 below, mobile phone subscriptions in Afghanistan (per 100 inhabitants) are still well below the world average (90.8), and somewhat less than Southern Asia (66.6).



Source: International Telecommunication Union, World Telecommunication/ICT Indicators Database

Female ownership and effective use of mobile phones not only can empower women, but also leads to economic advancement, as well as enhanced power and decision-making abilities.<sup>108</sup> Many women throughout the world perceive themselves as being more independent because of their mobile phone. Dominant cultural attitudes, however, can delay or prevent women in many countries from acquiring mobile phones. As Table 2 and Figure 2 below indicate, the Mobile Gender Gap is significant in Afghanistan (78%) and Pakistan (59%) where traditional female roles are firmly rooted, leaving women with little control over the purchase of a mobile phone. The mobile gaps in Bangladesh and Indonesia (40%), India (31%), and Southern Asia as a whole (37%) are much smaller than in Afghanistan.

	Mobile Gender Gap (%)	Female Mobile Phone Subscribers	Male Mobile Phone Subscribers	Female Mobile Phone Penetration (%)	Male Mobile Phone Penetration (%)
<b>Afghanistan</b>	78	1,329,008	6,488,686	10	45
Pakistan	59	22,320,087	57,155,007	25	61
Bangladesh	40	16,720,696	28,522,937	21	35
Indonesia	40	47,308,450	78,213,392	41	68
<b>Southern Asia</b>	37	.	.	.	.
India	31	161,265,651	249,463,614	28	40
<b>Middle East</b>	24	.	.	.	.
<b>Sub-Saharan Africa</b>	23	.	.	.	.
<b>Low-to-Middle Income Countries *</b>	21	.	.	.	.

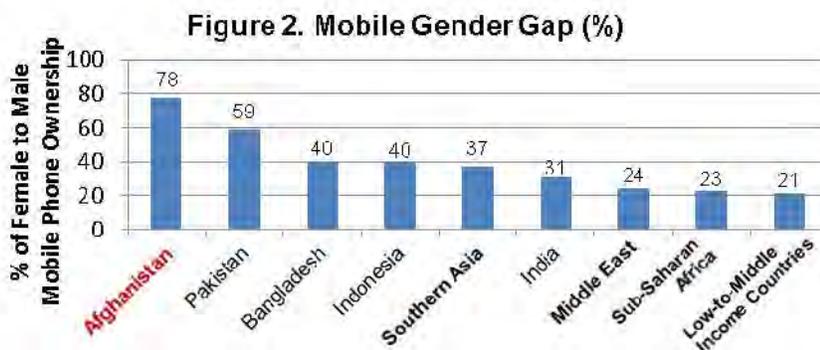
Source: GSMA and Vital Wave (2009). Notes:

- Mobile Gender Gap is calculated by looking at the rate of female mobile phone ownership relative to that of males. In Afghanistan, for instance, women are 78% less likely to own a mobile phone than their male counterparts.

- Mobile Phone Penetration rate describes the number of active mobile phone numbers (as a percentage) within a specific population.

- \* There are 300 million fewer female subscribers than male subscribers in low and middle-income countries.

<sup>k</sup> Of Afghani households that possess mobile phones, 91.8% are urban and 65.8% are rural.

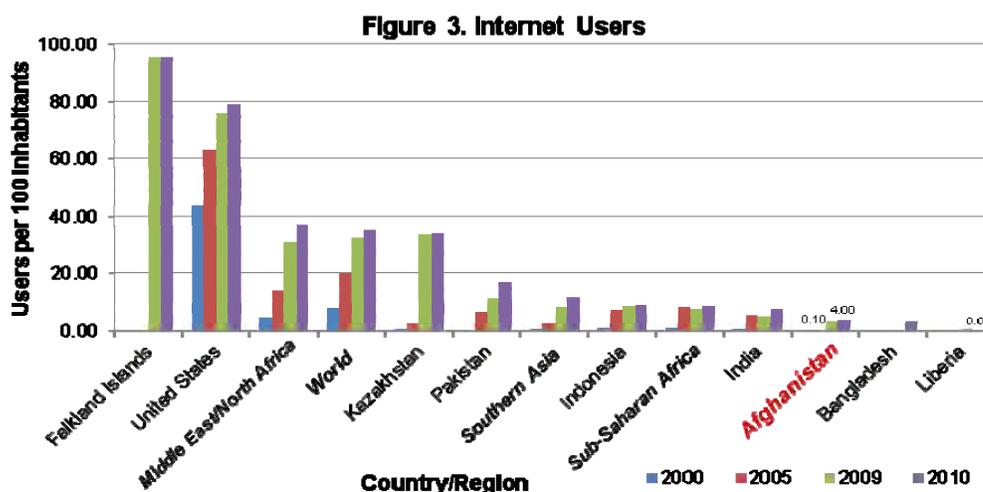


Source: GSMA and Vital Wave (2009)

Research conducted by Afghanistan's leading mobile operator, *Roshan*, suggests that Afghan men typically view the primary reason for a woman to have a mobile phone as providing "a connection between herself and her family, or in some cases, her workplace. Use outside this circle is often viewed with suspicion."<sup>110</sup> An initiative launched by *Roshan* and AfghanAid in 2007, called the Women's Public Call Office (WPCO), has encountered resistance. WPCOs, which are licensed phone booths used for domestic and international calls, are operated primarily by women, since micro loans with lower interest rates, and other discounts, are made available exclusively to them. Some female managers, however, were forced out of their WPCOs, due to "local peer pressure and outrage from male colleagues." Thus, while prevalent in other countries such as Grameen Village Phone System in Bangladesh, this type of program has become uncommon in Afghanistan.<sup>111</sup>

### Internet

Under the Taliban, the Internet was banned. Since 2001, despite efforts to establish proper connectivity, the price of Internet services in Afghanistan remains high. As a result, it is only accessible to a small section of the population. In 2010, 4 out of 100 Afghans used the Internet. While this is an improvement over the number of users in 2005 (0.1 out of 100 inhabitants), it remains significantly below the world average (35.4 out of 100).



Source: International Telecommunication Union, World Telecommunication/ICT Indicators Database

Since only a small percentage of households own their own computer, most people go to Internet cafés and public computer centers, where women are either barred from entering or they often face harassment from men. In early March 2012, the country's first female-only Internet café was opened in Kabul, named after Sahar Gul.<sup>1</sup> A reduced fee of 50 Afghanis (US\$1.00) per hour is less than other Internet cafes, and the venue creates a safe environment for women.

<sup>1</sup> Sahar Gul is a 15-year-old Afghan girl who was brutally tortured last year by her in-laws for refusing to become a prostitute. For more information, see: Ahang, Basir. January 2012. Sahar Gul's Story, A Clear Image of Women's Life in Afghanistan. <http://kabulpress.org/my/spip.php?article94563>

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