

Initiatives for afghan women involvement with politics



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Key Initiatives

Education: Investing in girls' education is the single most effective development decision a country can make. Beyond doubling the skilled workforce, this investment results in healthier young women, delayed marriages, and healthier children in the families that these educated young women create.

Under the Taliban, fewer than 900, 000 boys - and no girls - were enrolled in Afghanistan's schools. Today, more than 6. 2 million students are enrolled in Afghan schools, 35 percent of whom are girls. Although educational indicators remain poor in Afghanistan - and are worse for women who have only a 21 percent literacy rate - USG initiatives are removing barriers and opening doors.

Since 2001, the U. S. Agency for International Development (USAID) repaired or built more than 670 schools, printed 69 million textbooks, and improved the qualifications of 54, 000 Afghan teachers in instructional methodologies, subject knowledge and professional attitudes. These programs have expanded and improved the quality of community-based education in areas where there are no government schools. USG assistance has extended to 18 provinces, 1, 565 communities, more than 43, 000 children (60 percent of whom are girls), and 1, 565 teachers. In the last fiscal year, we provided literacy training and instruction in productive skills to more than 100, 000 people from over 1, 500 communities in 20 provinces. We are committed to working with the government of Afghanistan to further expand these

programs, and to enhance the female literacy rate and women's and girls' access to formal and informal education at all levels.

Security: We continue to urge the Afghan government to protect women leaders, and to take seriously the everyday threats against women and girls by extremists who try to discourage school attendance by destroying schools or throwing acid on young schoolgirls. We support and admire the bravery and determination of Afghan families and the Afghan girls who insist their access to education in the face of such threats. Our programs provide greater protection to girls' schools and health facilities, for example by building protective walls when requested. We are increasing women's participation in the security sector through both recruitment and promotion of women as well as training on gender-related topics for men with the Afghan National Police and Afghan National Army. From 2003 to the present, Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs (INL) programs have trained over 500 female police officers to play a stronger role regarding women's issues within the police force; 166 of those officers are employed in Family Response Units (FRUs) devoted to domestic violence cases. Our assistance has improved the number and capacity of FRUs that respond to cases of violence against women; U. S. mentors have worked with over three dozen FRUs in 10 provinces. These FRUs addressed 897 cases during 2009. Our programs also conduct outreach to Afghan communities to teach them about the FRUs and to encourage women affected by violence to make use of their services.

Political Process: For women to have a voice in their nation's political process, they need to be able to participate in all levels of government. They <https://assignbuster.com/initiatives-for-afghan-women-involvement-with-politics/>

need to be represented in greater numbers in civil service positions, and they need to have an active role in the peace process. UN Security Council Resolution 1325 reaffirms the need to include women in deliberations on international peace and security at all stages, including conflict resolution and post-conflict planning and peace-building. Their voices need to be heard, not only because they have the right to participate in the decisions that affect their lives, but also because their experiences and perspectives improve the quality of the resulting policies. Women's involvement in all Afghan conflict-resolution processes is a USG priority.

Women's caucuses are being strengthened in Parliament and their leadership developed in the civil service through professional exchange programs and technical assistance. We have increased the number of male and female Parliamentarians educated about the principles of equal rights that are enshrined in the Afghan Constitution. We need to encourage the expansion of existing national and international scholarships for women, as well as expanding the number of existing internship programs for women in Afghan Ministries, and are looking at funding options in this regard. In March, we are launching a program for emerging female leaders from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in the U. S. where they will receive diplomatic training.

In advance of Parliamentary elections this fall, we are making use of public outreach and education as well as financial support to Afghan-led civic education programs for men and women in order to encourage women's greater electoral participation, both as candidates and as voters. We have supported training for female members of Parliament and women leaders

elected at the grassroots level on how to be more effective and capable leaders.

Rule of Law and Human Rights: Some progress has been made in the area of women's human rights, but much remains to be done. Violence against women and girls is endemic, including domestic abuse, rape, forced marriages, forced prostitution, kidnappings, and so-called "honor" killings. This violence cannot be explained away as cultural; it is criminal, and must be addressed as such. The overall USG justice strategy explicitly refers to the need to ensure that women's rights are promoted and protected by Afghan justice systems. Central to that objective is the need to intertwine women's rights within both the formal and traditional sectors – and to ensure that USG funding for traditional justice programs provides a platform for supporting, rather than diminishing, women's rights.

Afghan women and girls can still be sent to prison for "moral crimes," including fleeing domestic violence or eloping. Many State Department Programs help civil society organizations and Afghan policy makers advocate for reform of such discriminatory laws, including the Gender Justice component of JSSP, the Increasing Women's Rights and Access to Justice in Afghanistan program, and the Advancing Human Rights and Women's Rights within an Islamic Framework program.

Our programs also train and educate male and female police officers, prosecutors, defense attorneys, corrections officers and others in civil society in the fair interpretation and application of the sections of the penal code that affect women. From January to mid-August 2009, 109 women and 905

men participated in INL-funded Justice Sector Support Program (JSSP) trainings and professional development opportunities. Some training topics focused on violence against women issues, including gender justice training for lawyers, victim advocacy training (with UNIFEM), gender justice training for corrections officers, and gender justice training for Family Response Unit police officers. When women are imprisoned, INL programs help examine why women are incarcerated and whether it is safe for them to return after their release, as well as advocate for humane treatment and the provision of education during and after incarceration.

With regard to women's involvement in local shuras, we work to link the state and traditional systems of governance to encourage them to isolate and reject traditional practices that harm women while harnessing and strengthening elements that reinforce women's equality and access to justice.

Our INL programs also provide counseling and shelter services to women affected by domestic violence. To build on these services, we are mobilizing attorneys, government officials, and the public to combat violence against women and trafficking in persons. We are encouraging the re-establishment of the Afghan women judges association, and we support the development of an Afghan women lawyer's network.

We exert moral suasion to promote human rights in Afghanistan by building awareness of the provisions and obligations of the international treaties and agreements to which Afghanistan is a signatory. The United States continues to support the Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC). In

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addition, we support the courageous progressive voices within Afghanistan, including the movements that successfully engaged with the Afghan government in 2009 to excise and redraft the most restrictive and objectionable sections of the Shia Personal Status Law , although some concerns remain. We continue to support the swift implementation and strict enforcement of the Elimination of Violence Against Women law. We engage women on how they can use their roles and influence within the family and community to combat the spread of violent extremist ideologies and to cultivate support for women's development.

We put our extensive PRT presence to use in extending public outreach on women's issues beyond the cities. With increased civilian expertise at PRTs we are more actively able to identify key women leaders, determine the needs of women in local communities, and identify and provide appropriate assistance. In many areas, these experts are able to ensure that women's shuras are consulted on development projects and have a say in local development matters.

Health: Progress on women's health has been substantial since 2002, but challenges clearly remain. Even after significant improvement, Afghanistan is still estimated to have the second-highest maternal mortality rate in the world. Other health indicators for women, particularly in reproductive health, are similarly low.

Drug addiction is also a problem among Afghan women and their children. INL funds the only three residential drug treatment centers for women, with adjacent child care and treatment facilities, in Kabul, Herat, and Balkh. Three

new centers will open in Farah, Badakhshan, and Nangarhar provinces during 2010.

With USG assistance, women's access to health care has risen dramatically since 2001. The number of midwives available to assist with deliveries has quadrupled; the number of health facilities with women health workers has more than doubled. According to a study by Johns Hopkins University, antenatal care visits went up sevenfold from 2003 to 2006. With more women receiving proper care from trained health workers during pregnancy and delivery, Afghans are seeing better outcomes for women and newborns.

We will continue to expand these existing programs to further increase women's access to health services, to essential medicines, family planning, and pre- and postnatal care so that women have access to the services and information they require for good health.

During Ambassador Verveer's trip to Afghanistan this past June, she and Ambassador Eikenberry announced the start of a small grants program to support gender equality in Afghanistan. The three-year USD 26.3 million program has recently made its first grants to women-led NGOs in the diverse areas of training in mechanized lace embroidery for sale, computer and English skills, radio programming for women, and the provision of dairy cows for women's agricultural initiatives. In all these ways, through the small grants programs and through other economic initiatives, Afghan women are improving their own lives and those of their families