

# Education barriers towards receiving an education, many begin

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Education is dynamic; it is the key that allows one to be able to break out of the cyclical pattern of poverty. It is a force that is suppressed. It is a force that many will fight for, and will not stop at any hindrance. But when there are copious barriers towards receiving an education, many begin to doubt the importance of this universal human right, especially if there had been a history of its suppression. Education had been subjugated in Afghanistan by the restriction of educating women during the Taliban's brutal reign, and the access to education today encompasses many obstructions for women including poverty for the masses, lack of government enforcement, as well as a lot of danger on the long journey to faraway government schools.

The multitude of deterrents has led to 66% of women in Afghanistan not receiving an education. <sup>1</sup> The government of Kabul must enforce stronger government regulation and the international community must hold the government responsible in order to inhibit the deeply rooted cultural practices of child marriage and child labor, as well as provide proper funding and structured organization for community-based education in order to encourage girls education in Afghanistan. The practice of child marriage must be inhibited by government regulation and monitored by the international community in order to promote girls receiving an education. While marriage before 18 is a violation of fundamental human rights, the child marriage rate in Afghanistan by 18 years old is 33%. <sup>6</sup> There are many cultural practices that are rooted in Afghanistan that perpetuate the practice of child marriage. The vast poverty that encompasses rural areas is one of the significant reasons.

In order to receive money or livestock, many families sell their daughters, tragically putting the value of bovid animals and money over their daughters. 4 Two additional cultural practices that promote child marriage while hindering girl's education are baad and baadal. Baad (baad dadan) is the practice of settling the conflict of murder between rival tribes by giving away a girl or woman for marriage. 7 Another traditional practice that pervades toxic attitudes towards girls in Afghanistan is baadal, an exchange of daughters between families for the marriage of their sons that are perceived as more valuable than their daughters. 7 Starting in April 2016, the Afghanistan Ministry of Women's Affairs and the Ministry of Information and Cultures with the aid of United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and the Canadian government have begun to develop a National Action Plan in order to eliminate early and child marriage.

This action plan has multiple stages, including holding preliminary workshops in Afghanistan communities in June 2016. This allowed for wide ranges of views and opinions to be collected in order to progress the action plan. Finally, in September 2016, the Ministry of Women's Affairs and the Deputy Ministry of Youth Affairs held a final consensus building workshop to finalize the national action plan and also began to outline strategies to accumulate resources and funding in order to ensure this National Action plan becomes a reality.

9 Thus far, there has been no updates on the implementation of this action plan. Heather Barr, a senior researcher for the Woman's Rights division at the Human Rights Watch has questioned the action plan, stating: “

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Unfortunately, the Afghan government's record of following through on plans to protect women's rights is abysmal. The 2007 National Action Plan for the Women of Afghanistan has done little but gather dust. The 2009 Law on the Elimination of Violence Against Women is largely unenforced. The 2015 plan to implement Security Council Resolution 1325, which requires full involvement of women in peace processes, languishes, with no realistic plan - or funding - for its implementation...

Afghanistan's child brides need much more than one more empty promise."

10 It is clearly evinced that the Afghan government lacks the effort and management ensuring the rights of Afghan girls. The practice of child marriage needs more than just government regulation. Outside sources such as the international community and the UN must hold the Afghanistan government accountable for making progress in the eradication of child marriage in order to promote girls education in Afghanistan. The suppression of child labor is another conventional custom that must be repressed by the government of Kabul in order to promote girl's education. There are many underlying causes that eternize the lack of girl's education in Afghanistan, especially relating back to the biggest factor that causes child marriage: poverty. The carpet weaving industry in Afghanistan currently violates many child labor laws and inhibits both male and female education.

Carpet weaving is interpreted as not a physically demanding job leading to 93% of the member of the carpet weaving industry are between the ages 5-11. 11 The carpet weaving industry has extended hours, from 5 AM to

nightfall, with only a four-hour break to attend school. The consequences of working in this industry include many health problems such as eye injuries or hand injuries from the loom, respiratory illness from prolonged periods of exposure to wool dust, and carpal tunnel syndrome due to the repetitive task.

These illnesses can affect children's attendance to school and can cause lifelong ailments that can continue to inhibit education. The carpet weaving industry is also more concentrated to girls, with 58% of girl laborers compared to 42% of boys. <sup>11</sup> The higher rates of female children being involved in the carpet weaving industry are due to the deep cultural norms, as women are restricted to labor that is within the household. This cycle continues to be perpetuated as mothers teach their daughters to weave in order to continue to support the household business. The effect on the education of women in child weaving environment clearly demonstrate attitudes towards women that maintain low education rates for girls. While half the male respondents within weaving households were illiterate, a distressing 91% of female respondents from the same weaving household were illiterate. <sup>12</sup> It is clearly demonstrated that girls within child labor constrained from education, leading to the cycle of a low girls education rate.

The government of Kabul and the international community must come together in order to quell the child labor industries to assist the elevation of girls education in Afghanistan. The government of Kabul and the international community must provide proper funding and organization for community-based education to operate in Afghanistan. Community-based

education systems (CBE's) are supported by NGOs while being monitored by the government. Currently, CBEs are funded entirely through foreign donors. These programs cater students in rural areas without Afghan schools, support those that are lagging in their studies, as well as accept children that cannot attend government schools due to their older age. With the priority of entrance of CBEs given to girls, CBEs is a groundbreaking development towards the education of women. Most of CBE teachers are also female, which means CBEs also provide job opportunities for female teachers.

The fact that female teachers are solely teaching at CBEs is also very important in the education of girls as many Afghan fathers will not allow education of their girls if the teachers are male. <sup>1</sup> Another benefit that arises from the use of CBEs is the fact that CBEs are effective programs. Research conducted by the USAID had found that implementations of CBE programs in Afghanistan have to lead to the increase in girl's learning assessment scores by 0.3 standard deviations and increased girl's attendance to school by 16%.<sup>2</sup> CBEs also avoid putting Afghan girls in potential danger during the journey to school. There is clear research that has demonstrated that the long distances to school are a huge deterrent to girls obtaining education, as the Poverty Action Lab research has also discovered that each additional mile of distance to school leads to a decrease of enrollment in schools by a staggering 19%.

<sup>3</sup> CBEs eliminate the long journeys to often far away government schools, possibly encouraging the enrollment of schools. The structures and systems of CBEs should be implemented across Afghanistan with the support of not

only NGOs and foreign donors, but also of government funding in order to encourage the rate of education among girls in Afghanistan. Due to the Afghan government being incompetent in making progression for female rights, the international community and the United Nations should be involved in ensuring that the current state of child marriage and child labor in Afghanistan is rectified while CBEs are built. The presence of child marriage and child labor are signs of the desperation of poverty within communities in Afghanistan that look for a quick fix and see little value in education. What is misunderstood by these families is that by putting their girls in child marriage or child labor they are sustaining their families' poverty cycle.

Their lack of education leads them to turn to tradition and practices that are rooted in culture when the key to escaping generations of poverty is education. It is difficult to change the conventional practices of child labor and child marriage in Afghanistan. With further law enforcement on these two detrimental systems and more prevalence of education centers by the building of CBEs, there is hope in a rising girl's education rate in Afghanistan.