

Education for Afghan Girls

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In Afghanistan, does lack of education for girls lead to child marriage, violence, and lack of jobs, or do all those things lead to a lack of education? The answer to both is yes. The problems women are facing today in Afghanistan are very interconnected, and form a cycle. In 2018, 71% of the kids not in school were girls, and Time magazine claimed “Afghanistan is still the worst place in the world to be a woman.” Many women in Afghanistan are victims of domestic abuse, were married before 18, and government stats from 2014 say 80% of all suicides were committed by women. In 2017 a 23-year-old woman tried to set herself on fire in order to escape domestic abuse, said Time Magazine. Cases like these are very common, and many women in Afghanistan feel that they are imprisoned in the life they lead. Improving education would lead to more solutions for all discrimination against women, but there are many contributing factors: culture based systemic sexism, poverty related to war, and laws not being enforced.

I believe that the root cause that could be solved most effectively and quickly would be the fact that laws protecting women simply aren't enforced. I also believe that this is a really important root cause because Afghanistan has many laws against discrimination of women, but at this point, most of them are basically just empty words on paper. 80% of Afghanistan is rural, so the government physically can't get to most communities and make a change; poor infrastructure makes it hard for police enforcement and government officials to get to the majority of the country. In those communities, makeshift governments usually formed by extremist groups like the Taliban (which controls 60% of the country as of 2018) are making it very dangerous for girls to actually try and get an education. Therefore, In my project, I will be focusing on improving infrastructure and security for rural Afghanistan.

To improve infrastructure and security for Afghan girls, we need to put money into three things: creating more schools, resources, and incentives for families, improving roads in order to connect rural communities to the rest of the country, and placing more police in rural areas to protect women and girls. Addressing my first point; A lack of schools in general as well as a lack of resources is one of the biggest barriers for girls trying to get an Education. 40% of schools in Afghanistan don't have buildings, and many girls are kept from getting an education simply because the schools are too far away. Getting actual school buildings and ones closer to girls as well as access to school supplies will make a huge impact on girls going to school. Very poor families also will sell off their girls' future, whether by child labour or child marriage, so giving them paid incentives to put their girls in school would have a huge impact on the number of children enrolled. Second, we need to invest in improving roads, because aid and police as well

as government officials are sometimes completely unable to reach communities because they are disconnected from everything. This prevents the government and NGOs from creating institutionalized and sustainable education. The government has many laws, including a compulsory education law, but they have a hard time actually enforcing it. If we connected all of Afghanistan more then the government would have no excuse for leaving these laws unenforced. Lastly, we need to invest in physical security for girls. With the lawlessness of rural Afghanistan, many girls are at risk of physical harm by attempting to go to school, such as abductions and kidnappings, acid attacks, extremist attacks, bombings, and sexual harassment. If they had more security and protection, then families would be more willing to put their girls in school. Unfortunately, the Afghan government is millions of dollars in debt, and therefore I believe that we, the US, need to get involved and help fund these programs. The Afghan government and aid contractors additionally need to have more oversight and accountability for our investments. Then we can ensure that the aid we send goes to the people and doesn't feed corruption.

Addressing these three key points will have such a big impact on Afghanistan. We already know that educated women have a greater chance of escaping poverty, leading healthier and more productive lives, and raising the standard of living for their children, families, and communities. Lots of developing countries could solve many problems by investing in their women and girls, Afghanistan included. "Education is an antidote for ignorance, poverty, and war" (Central Asia Institute). Educated women also have more chances to come into government positions, so they can work in high levels of power to change the lives of other women living in Afghanistan. Peace in Afghanistan is partly contingent on improvement of women's rights, because as Nancy Lindborg, the United States Institute of Peace's president and CEO said, "We know from experience and conviction that for peace to be sustainable it must be inclusive." a 2017 Brookings Institution study found that gender equality and democracy strengthen each other, and so it is vital that women's voices are heard if Afghanistan is going to create a sustainable government and long term peace. Education is just the first step.

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