

# The Conditions of Women Education Post 9/11 event in Kabul City, Afghanistan

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**Abstract:** This paper investigates about the Conditions of women education post 9/11 event in Kabul City, the capital of Afghanistan. Kabul is the most populous city of Afghanistan. In 2012 its total population was about 289,000 which rose to 3,678,034 in the year 2015. Afghanistan has been one of the countries that have been dominated by instability and conflicts and the education for Afghan women remains deplorable, despite rigorous efforts to improve their freedom, rights and quality of life. Pre 9/11 event, Afghanistan's education indicators have always been low (literacy rates have not risen above 25 percent in the last three decades) and the state's role in the provision of education has always been limited. Historically, mosques have been the main provider of education for children. Since the Unites States led alliance toppled the Taliban led government in November 2001, women in Afghanistan have gained greater freedom to participate in public life and have better access to education, health care, and employment. After 9/11, there has been some improvements in the educational sector of Afghanistan particularly Kabul City in the last decade. The number of student's enrolment has increased since 2002. The percentage of girls in primary schools has significantly increased according to 2011 data. The figures in high schools have also shown remarkable improvement. However, a dramatic increase has occurred in higher education in the years 2001 to 2012. Factors including Social-Cultural Barriers, Insecurity, Poverty, early marriage, Lack of female teachers, etc. were the main obstacles which affected female education.

**Keywords:** Women Education, Post 9/11 event, Kabul City, Afghanistan.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Education has been proved to be the foundation of every society and good news for its bright future, and access to education, is a certain and fundamental right of all human beings, particularly in children. It is famously said, "Where the gate of a school opens, the gates of ignorance are closed." From the sacred teachings of Islamic religion, national and international instruments, education is the right of all children, both girl and boy that leads to the civilized and literate society which is inborn of strong nation (Gholam and Abdulhaq, 2005). All Afghan children should access this right fairly and equally, without any discrimination on such grounds as race, ethnicity, religious denomination, language, place of birth, social status, and so forth. Equality of educational opportunity is one of the prerequisites of the society. Education means change, growth, and development in a person's physical, psychological, social, intellectual, and technical talents. As a means of child development and a ground for the realization of other human rights, education is considered a key economic and social right. Education is significant for facilitating access to a better level of life, for eradicating poverty, for reducing the impacts of child labour, and for promoting gender equality. Education helps children to grow into adults who can fully participate in the social and political lives of their country. Education also helps address certain cross-cutting issues like public health, economic development, and social mobility (Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission AIHRC, 2005). Afghanistan has long had one of the poorest education records in the world, with a low rate of school attendance and a high percentage of illiteracy. Between 1996 and 2001, under the Islamic group the Taliban, the educational situation in Afghanistan deteriorated. The school curriculum was restricted, schools were destroyed and Afghan females were banned from all educational life. After the Taliban fell from power in late 2001, an international effort to reconstruct the educational system ensued. The number of students enrolled in schools in the last decade, among them the highest percentage are of female students. Despite the progress, authorities in Afghanistan recorded a series of

attacks on girls' schools by suspected Taliban supporter. Many people in the country say it will take a long time to turn around male attitudes towards women. A large amount of material designed for the 2004 elections has been specifically designed to encourage women to vote, and to educate them about this right. Now a days, the women education is still a big issue in Afghanistan, under the Taliban regime (1996-2001) female education were considered bad and they eradicated women from all aspects of their educational life. Taliban banned all kinds of educational activities for women in the whole country and also did not allow female to work. Some girls were secretly educated in their homes by parents and teachers; others attended underground schools (MoE, 2005). At one time, education in Afghanistan was very highly regarded. Until the mid-1990s, the University of Kabul attracted students from Asia and the Middle East, and had links to other educational Centre's around the globe. Its status began to decline, however, when the Former Soviet Union forces entered Afghanistan in the winter of 1979. The Taliban imposed restrictions on Afghan educational institutions and demanded that religion be emphasized at the expense of all other subjects. On the Taliban's orders, around half of the country's schools were destroyed. In 1998, a United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) report revealed nine out of 10 Afghan girls and almost two out of three Afghan boys failed to be enrolled at school. By 2000, UNICEF reported that only 4 to 5% of Afghan children were being educated at the primary school level. Fewer still had access to secondary and university-level education UNISCO, 2011).

This article provides some statistics of female education since 2002. It has also highlighted the major obstacles affecting women education in Kabul city, Afghanistan. The conclusion and recommendation have been discussed in the last part of this article.

## 2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research methodology included the following steps.

For achieving the above objectives both primary and secondary data were used in the research.

The primary data was collected through survey and focus group discussions (FGDs) with the residents and officials of education department to investigate about the causes responsible for low literacy ratio of female in Kabul City, Afghanistan. The secondary data was collected from different sources including the Ministry of Higher Education of Afghanistan, books, research articles, thesis, Newspaper and internet.

## 3. DISCUSSION

Historically, women have been remained in a critical condition in terms of education, social and political participation in the male dominant society of Afghanistan. The low level of participation of women in education could be considered as a key challenge to the development of the country. The World Bank declared that, "before 1960 only men could receive a higher education". Gender inequality, particularly in education, reached its peak during the Taliban era. Jackson (2011) indicated that, "under the Taliban, the majority of girl's schools were closed and gross enrolment fell from 32% to just 6.4%."

### 3.1. FEMALE EDUCATION SINCE 2002

A large number of international organizations started working with the government of Afghanistan in order to rebuild the educational system. This has resulted in some improvement in education sector. However, despite the development, the current situation of education is not as it was expected to be.

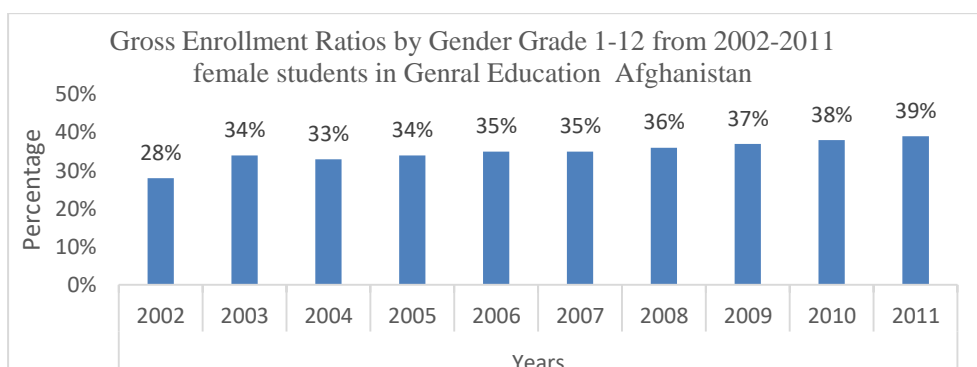


Figure 1. Source: Ministry of Higher Education of Afghanistan MoHE, 2010

### 3.1.1. GENERAL EDUCATION

The statistics above depicts very high differences of male-female ratio in each level of education. Female students are decreasing in higher levels of education. The Ministry of Education in its National Education Strategic Plan for Afghanistan 2010-2014 declared that, “of the 10,998 general education schools, 6071 were primary, 3061 were lower secondary and 1866 were upper secondary. Around 15% were girls’ school, 35% boys’ schools, and 50% schools for both boys and girls who learnt in different shifts. Of the total 412 rural and urban districts there were only 151 districts with at least one upper secondary girls’ school; others did not have any upper secondary girls’ schools”. The number of girls’ schools was still roughly about half the number of boys’ schools in 2011. In principle the mixed schools were open for both boys and girls usually in separate shifts (Lexow, 2012). Regarding the reported numbers of enrolment (Grades 1-12) from 2002-2011 in general education by Lexow, the percentages of the female students in general education were 28% in 2002, 34% in 2003, 33% in 2004, 34% in 2005, 35% in 2006 and 2007, 36% in 2008, 37% in 2009, 38% in 2010 and 39% in 2011. In 2013, 10.5 million students were studying at 16,600 schools of which 38% were females. There were 210 thousand teachers with 32% of them being women. In 2014, 1.7 million were enrolled which reached to 11.5 million students of which 42% were females (MoE, Marifat Weekly, No. 170, April 2014).

### 3.1 .2. HIGHER EDUCATION

Gender inequality in higher education is higher than in general education because females are mostly not provided with the opportunities to continue their studies in higher levels. According to Packer (2010), “by 2001 there were just 7800 students representing one of the lowest enrolment rates in the world.” The rate of growth for male and female students in general education is about the same; however, the rate of growth for female students in higher education is lower due to social and cultural constraints in some parts of the country and smaller number of female secondary school graduates (currently there are twice as many boys as girls in the secondary schools; based on girls enrolment in primary and middle schools, the situation should gradually improve). It should be pointed out that in spite of the relative expansion of education, in 2012 only 58 % of school age children (70 % boys and 45 % girls) were in basic education. Lack of security, constraints in educational services and limited financial resources are the main obstacles for more rapid growth of general education (MoHE, 2010).

Table 1 depicts the enrolment of students in higher education which has increased from 31,203 in 2002 to 101,000 in 2012 which is more than three folds. Table 2 reflects the distribution of students by Faculty in 2002 to 2010. Currently 81,785 male and 19,215 female students (19.0 %) are enrolled in 31 public sector universities and institutes not only in Kabul but also other 26 Provinces of Afghanistan (Table 3). About a quarter of students attend universities in Kabul, which provide boarding facilities for male and female students, and a significant portion of the students in Kabul universities come from provincial secondary schools. Furthermore, 80% of increase has been recorded in enrolment in higher education during that period. In the year 2002 there were 17 universities and higher education institutes in Kabul and the other twelve provinces. Since 2002, higher education facilities have been developed in 13 other provinces, notably Bamyan, Paktia and Baghlan, where current student enrolments are more than 2500. The female enrolment between 2002 and 2012 increased from 4200 to 19200 students (nearly five-fold), but the percentage of female students remained the same (19%). Despite the increase in enrolments, the rate of growth for female students in higher education nationwide has not improved over the last ten years due to constraints in some parts of the country, and fewer female graduates from secondary schools. The universities with higher female enrolments are in Herat (34%), Kabul (27%), Balkh (25%), Samangan (24%), Faryab (23%) and Badakhshan (21%). The major universities in the South and East of the country have low female student enrolments: Kandahar (5.8%), Nangarhar (5.7%), Paktia (4.7%) and Khost (1.2%) (MoHE, 2010).

**Table 1: Growth of Student Enrolment in Afghanistan (2002–2012)**

Year	General Education			Higher Education		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	female	Total
2002	1,700,000	700,000	2,400,000	27,000	4200	31,200
2004	2,700,000	1,300,000	4,000,000	24,500	6200	30,700
2006	3,500,000	1,900,000	5,400,000	30,600	8800	39,400
2008	3,900,000	2,300,000	6,200,000	48200	12,900	61,800
2010	4,300,000	2,700,000	7,000,000	62,900	14,830	77,730
2012	5, 359,000	3,284,000	8,643,000	81,785	19,215	101,000

Source: Ministry of Higher Education of Afghanistan MoHE, 2010

**Table 2: Higher Education Enrolment by Faculty from 2002-2010**

	2002				2010			
	Male	Female	Total	%	Male	Female	Total	%
Agriculture	3060	34	3094	9.92	7337	238	7575	9.92
Engineering	3833	145	3978	12.75	6379	239	6618	8.67
N. Science	1345	690	2035	6.52	1196	787	1983	2.59
Computer Science					1268	268	1536	2.01
Geology & Mining	953	12	965	3.09	2235	148	2383	3.12
Medicine	5068	1127	6195	19.85	4565	1472	6037	7.91
Veterinary Science	427	3	430	1.38	647	52	699	0.92
Pharmacy	287	42	329	1.05	285	134	419	0.55
Fine Arts	134	36	170	0.54	553	159	712	0.93
Economy	1616	134	1750	5.61	3636	272	3908	5.12
Law & P. Science	2201	355	2556	8.19	3511	672	4183	5.48
Social Science	771	460	1231	3.95	2256	628	2884	3.77
Journalism	523	127	650	2.08	624	92	716	0.94
Education	1479	1274	2753	8.82	17217	7055	24272	31.78
Lang. & Literature	2445	1340	3785	12.13	5830	2118	7948	10.41
Theology	1098	184	1282	4.11	3621	871	4492	5.88
Total	25240	5963	31203	100.00	61160	15205	76365	100.00

Source: Ministry of Higher Education of Afghanistan MoHE, 2010

**Table 3: Growth of Student Enrolment in Kabul Universities: 2002 - 2012**

		2002		2012		Increase 2002-2012	
		Total	% female	Total	% female	Increase	% Increase
1	Kabul University	9353	13.7	17573	23.7	8220	87.9
2	Kabul Medical University	2464	21.3	2247	43.4	199 Dec.	
3	Kabul Polytechnic University	1625	3.1	2966	5.9	1341	82.5
4	Kabul Education University	1744	43.4	6139	41.8	4395	252

Source: Ministry of Higher Education of Afghanistan MoHE, 2010

### 3.3. THE MAIN OBSTACLES FOR FEMALE EDUCATION

“Gender based stigma, discrimination, violence and stereotyping in education, as well as gender disparities in learning outcomes, are visible in all countries, regardless of the status of their economic or educational development” (UNESCO, UNESCO Priority Gender Equality Action Plan for 2014-2021, 2013). But gender equality is more tangible in Afghanistan. Women are in a deteriorating situation. According to World Bank (2005), “Afghanistan’s education indicators are among the worst in the world that girls and rural populations are especially disadvantaged and have been so for decades”. Main obstacles for female education in Afghanistan are discussed below.

#### 3.3.1. SOCIAL-CULTURAL BARRIERS

One of the major barriers to realizing women’s rights in Afghanistan is the way in which traditional practices and conservative interpretations of social norms restrict women’s participation in public life. Traditions are often reinforced by arbitrary invocation of religion to further restrict women’s movement. As stated by the Minister for Women’s Affairs:

“Afghan women are facing unacceptable customs from decades ago that are just obeyed. These traditions do not have any religious or legal basis, but the people accept them. On the other hand conservative religious thinking is also used to reinforce gender perceptions that limit the ability of women to perform a role within society. Post 9/11 various changes occurred in women life’s in Afghanistan, particularly in education, healthcare, and men attitude toward women. Still in urban and rural areas of the country social cultural barriers is a big challenge for women to participate in public life (UNAMA, 2009).

### **3.3.2. LAW AND ORDER SITUATIONS**

Insecurity is another factor which prevents girls from participating in education. The Ministry of Education estimated that, “17 of Afghanistan’s provinces offered secure access to education, while in the remaining 17 there were degrees of insecurity, although education provision was continually being negotiated with local communities” (MoE, National Education Interim Plan-2011-2013, 2011). The Taliban mostly attacked or threatened girls’ schools, teacher and students. “The UN reported more than 1000 attacks on education in 2009-2012, including schools being set on fire, suicide bombings and remotely detonated bombs, killings of staff, threats to staff and abductions” (Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack-GCPEA, 2014). GCPEA explained that, The Taliban tried to close girls’ school by attacking, poisoning drinking water, releasing gas into the air and threatening the teachers, governmental employees and communities to close girls’ schools by distributing “Night Letters”, threatening letters. “Some letters warned that failure to comply with the demand would lead to retribution, such as acid or gas attacks. Kabul law and order situation compare to the Pre 9/11 Event, seems better and more stable after Taliban regime. Presently many girls are attending schools and media after 9/11 playing a vital role in women education. Media and it role in security of a country has impact on the awareness of people as well in education. Recently, media role in law and order and stability of capital city Kabul and across the country offers major contribution in awareness of people. In the Kabul city people are blissful to developments of media. Currently people are closely associated with media, because Media has an important role in bringing security, stability in awareness of people and promoting of women rights in capital city Kabul (GCPEA, 2014).

### **3.3.3. LOW ECONOMIC CONDITIONS**

Economic conditions in Afghanistan, post 9/11 Event improved which in turn brought improvements in education sector. After Taliban regime, particularly NGOs and other donors were much closely associated in economic conditions in the country as they were in the past. Nowadays many families are in good economic conditions. They can send their daughters to school and even abroad for study, but economy needs to be improved more as still there are some families which can’t afford their children’s education. Indeed most of schools in Afghanistan supported by (NGO) in rural and urban areas. The capital city, Kabul’s economic conditions of families are better than other cities, but economy of Afghanistan is still needed to be improved to provide basic facilities to the people (UN, 2013).

### **3.3.4. EARLY MARRIAGES**

The norm of early marriage creates both social and legal impediments to girls’ education. Not only girls drop out due to increased domestic responsibilities after marriage, but a law passed in the mid-1970s prohibiting married women from attending high-school classes was upheld by the Afghan government in September 2003, and defended on grounds that it was meant to “protect unmarried girls from learning explicit details about sex from their married classmates”. Therefore, to cater to the needs of married girls in Kabul, the Ministry of Education set up a vocational high school in the Ministry of Women’s Affairs. In 2004, the law was finally changed by a Presidential Decree at the initiative of the Ministry of Women’s Affairs, lifting the prohibition against married women attending high school. With the formal obstacles removed, married girls may still face difficulties in remaining at school alongside unmarried girls, since objections from other parents and religious leaders could be anticipated according to various school administrators in Kabul. Media has passed a great deal of information, which is a positive step towards reducing violence. Even the Afghan women who have founded their own businesses are currently trying to profit from media coverage. They show their wares in exhibitions, where they try to catch the eyes of reporters, drawing their attention to their products, generally handicrafts (Olesen, 2005).

### **3.3.5. LACK OF FEMALE TEACHERS**

The lack of qualified teachers is one of the greatest challenges for the improvement of education in Afghanistan. In this circumstance, a lack of female teachers is more tangible. Even girls’ only schools face lack of female teachers. The government has to hire male teachers. Regarding their beliefs, parents disagree with male teachers in a girls’ school.

According to the MoE (2011), “Females constitute only 1 percent, 3 percent, and 4 percent of teachers in the provinces of Paktika, Khost, and Uruzgan” (MoE, National Educational Interim Plan; 2011-2013, 2011). Lack of female teachers can be a major cause of low participation of girls in education. Currently in capital city Kabul, there are many female teachers in schools and universities compare to Pre- 9/11. But still because of culture, conservative people and religious beliefs some families do not let their daughters to go school. But recently media is playing a vital role in improvements and awareness in Kabul and other cities across the country (MoE, 2011).

#### 4. CONCLUSION

This paper demonstrated about women education Post 9/11 event in Kabul, the Capital city of Afghanistan. Decades of conflicts in Afghanistan almost destroyed all the infrastructure and particularly educational system of the country. Post 9/11 when the U.S army toppled the Taliban government in November 2001, women in Afghanistan gained greater freedom to participate in public life and access to education, healthcare and employment. There have been some improvements in the educational sector in Afghanistan particularly in Kabul during the last decade. The number of student’s enrolment has been increased after 2002. The percentage of girls in primary schools has increased from 28% to 39% from 2002 to 2011. Although the figures in high schools have also shown remarkable increase over the years from 2002 to 2012 (31,203-101,000). However, a dramatic increase has occurred in higher education. It has increased from 20% in 2001 to 40% in 2012. Various factors were responsible for the improvement in literacy ratio in the study area. The main obstacles include social-cultural barriers, insecurity, early marriages, poverty, lack of female teachers etc. Afghanistan is one of the countries where the society needs peace and stability. Peace is the basic need of the Afghan people, and education is one of the approaches which are required to help in bringing stability to Afghanistan. Therefore, all citizens of Afghanistan both men and women should take part in education in order to improve the current situation and bring peace and stability.

#### 5. RECOMMENDATIONS

The end of Taliban government in November 2001 raised hopes that the women across the country in particularly Kabul would rapidly regain their human rights. But the continuing threat is the security that women face in the north and elsewhere has in large measure rendered women’s participation in public life almost impossible. This study identifies that the most fundamental problem of women is the very patriarchal structure of the society. Inequalities originate from extreme religious beliefs and traditions. In traditional division of labour, a woman’s role is within the household and is focused on serving a man. Women, as half of the population and first educators of children can have important roles in development of a society. Here, women’s illiteracy can be considered as a big challenge for the progress of the country. As it is argued before, the problem for female education is mostly the restrictive structure of the society. So, the social change desired doesn’t take place in a short period of time. But still regarding the findings presented in this article the following recommendations can be offered

1. Develop local adoptable plans to explore educational opportunities for girls. In this case wide research is needed for the government to understand the problems in any part of the country.
2. Increase qualified female teachers in the remote areas through establishing local teacher training centres.
3. Motivate the female teachers through performance-based salary increment. Currently, those who have ability and higher degrees do not want to teach at schools because of the low wages unless they can’t find high paying jobs.
4. Raise women’s literacy level through establishment of literacy courses both in rural and urban areas. This could be effective in terms of changing the attitudes towards females’ education.
5. Strengthen communities’ sense of ownership and responsibility through involvement in decision making processes.
6. Strengthen government monitoring system on the projects implemented by the government itself, its contractors and NGOs. The budget should not be spent based on favouritism and biases. The government and international donors should focus on the areas with the greatest need.

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