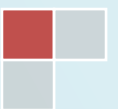


Afghanistan NGO Report on ICESCR: A Woman Prospective



**Afghan Women's Network
May 2010**



Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and the Afghanistan State

NGO report

The United Nations

Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights

May 2010

A Women's Perspective

Introduction

The Afghanistan NGO Report on the International Covenant on Socio-Economic and Cultural Rights is produced through the collaborative efforts of the Afghan Women's Network (AWN) with technical support from PWESCR (Programme on Women's Economic, Social and Cultural Rights). The report is designed to ensure that Afghan women's perspectives will be reflected in the Afghanistan's review session in Geneva by UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (the Committee) on 12th and 14th May 2010. AWN and PWESCR organized a workshop/consultation on May 4th, in UNIFEM Women's Center in Kabul at which more than 25 women NGO representatives, women from private sector and independent activists participated. The report has also been enriched by the input and collaboration from several other women's right activists who contributed to the substantive content.

The report highlights key concerns regarding women's enjoyment of socio-economic and cultural rights in Afghanistan with the support of international assistance and state reconstruction agenda. The report presents recommendations suggested by contributors and collaborators from the May 4th workshop held in Kabul. It is important to note that the report draws on earlier findings and recommendations that were included in AWN report to Beijing +15 held in New York in March 2010.

AWN is one of the largest independent advocacy platform of Afghan women activists and acts as an umbrella organization for women-headed NGOs in Kabul and in all 34 provinces in Afghanistan. AWN has seventy-two (72) member organizations and 3000 individuals working together to advance the status of women and children in Afghanistan and Pakistan. AWN envisions an Afghanistan society- its women and men, and children - as genuine and equal participants in the development efforts in the country. It aspires to create an Afghan community that values, respects, encourages, and harnesses the untapped capacities of women (and men) and their contributions to Afghan culture and society.

Afghan would like to thank PWESCR,, member organization, individuals who generously contributed in short time their prospective, ideas, evidence and helped in editing of the report.

List of Acronyms:

ANDS	Afghanistan National Development Strategy
AIHRC	Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission
CEDAW	Convention on all form of Discrimination against women
CDC	Community Development Council
DOWA	Directory of Women's Affairs
DDR	Disarmament and Demobilization of Armed groups
EVAW	Elimination of Violence Against Women (bill on women's rights in Afghanistan endorsed recently)
MoF	Ministry of Finance
MoWA	Ministry of Women's Affairs
MRRD	Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development
MoPH	Ministry of Public Health
NGO	Non-Governmental groups
NSP	National Solidarity Program
VAW	Violence Against Women

Overview:

After 30 years of war and continuous insurgency Afghanistan, with support of international community, made some movement from the socio-economic and cultural hardships towards a renewed start.

In the policy arena, the Government of Afghanistan (GoA) has approved the National Action Plan for the Women of Afghanistan (NAPWA) - a 10 year action plan for women's development and progress in which there is due focus on various ESC rights, such as health, education, and economic status. The Afghanistan National Development strategy (ANDS), the macro-economic plan based on Millennium Development Goals, is another important policy which includes nine (9) bench marks on women's progress and development. The Elimination of Violence Against Women Law (EVAW) has been passed. Perhaps most importantly the Afghanistan Constitution (which is reflected in Afghanistan's Government report to CESCR) emphasizes articles 22 and 83 which pertain to women's rights.

The Afghan government can be applauded for many positive steps taken in the direction of progress through policies and laws designed to promote women's and men's equal benefit from socio-economic progress of the country. However, to date, the movement towards equality and equity are hindered by significant challenges and remain far from reality in Afghan culture and society. In practice there are many discrepancies between the policy and legal environment and the achievement of their goals in the equality in sectors such as education, and in meeting the targets set in health sector.

Women are the "unseen victims" of the continuing conflict. This is manifested in a range of ways. For example, the loss of a male member of the family often means the loss of a breadwinner leaving widows and families without support and is exacerbated by the serious lack of adequate social safety nets. Women bear an even greater burden due to the current insecurity in the country because it restricts access to existing local services such as education, health care and livelihood opportunities for which few, if any, alternatives are available.

The Government of Afghanistan (GoA) will need to move from rhetorical and symbolic support to more substantively implementation of its policies and laws. This requires taking serious steps with regard to affirmative action to break through the historical challenges, cultural barriers and patriarchal attitudes that emerged and were reinforced during years of war. Without such commitment on the part of GoA, real progress towards gender equality in the country will be considerably weak.

Main Concern and Issues:

Gender based Discrimination and prevalence of Violence Against women is a cross cutting phenomena that needs to be tackled on all fronts. A report produced by the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC) concludes that gender-based discrimination remains entrenched in public and private sectors. As a result the economic status of women remains extremely low. Although the Afghan constitution enshrines equality of women and men in law, in practice there are many gaps and inadequate efforts by the state to address inequality issues.

According to evidence from several civil society activists, many women who follow regulatory procedures for issuing passports, are asked by authority to present male permission (close male relative husband, father and brother) to obtain necessary documents for travel. Afghanistan Shiite Personal Law is yet another example of inequality which, despite enormous protests by women, remain unchanged on many matters discriminating against women law (2009). The Elimination of Violence Against Women Bill which was endorsed by Afghan president, while an important bold step, is still to enter full enforcement in Afghan courts.

The socioeconomic status of women is further exacerbated by widespread violence toward women in Afghanistan.¹ The Violence against Women (VAW) Primary Data (MOWA, 2007) shows that forced and early marriages are the most common VAW cases reported. The victims of elopement as an outcome of forced marriage are prosecuted, sentenced and imprisoned by the state even though it is not criminal under the Penal Code.

Proposed Questions to the Government of Afghanistan

- ***What mechanism has the Afghan Government put in place to measure progress in the elimination of gender discrimination impeding women progress in access to socio-economic rights?***
- ***What practical steps has the Afghan Government taken to end negative practices according to Afghan Constitution (2004) which impedes women socio-economic and cultural rights?***
- ***What steps has the Afghan government taken to register marriage as tool to decrease child marriage, multiple marriages and legalizing women marital rights of (property, good and money in the form of Islamic Maher)?***
- ***The lack of human rights protection for poor people, particularly women continues unabated. Please describe what measure the government has taken to combat and prevent corruption - at all levels of Government - including Judiciary?***
- ***How does Afghan government justify the discriminatory articles in Shiite Personal Law as step towards prohibition of discrimination against women?***

¹ AHIRC shadow report on ESCR, November 2009

Proposed Recommendation to the Government of Afghanistan

- ***The Afghan Government is urged to enforce professional standards, codes of ethics and disciplinary measures not only in the administration but also in the private sector and international aid coming to Afghanistan. In order to increase transparency and aid effectiveness and to address administrative corruption practical steps should be taken for the establishment of the High Office of Oversight per earlier vow in London Conference. Women participation should be integral part of the formation and structure of such bodies.***
- ***Take concrete measures to enforce rights of women and strengthen their role within the Afghan society by increasing access to justice and economic opportunities. The process of law reforms and amendment according to Afghan constitution and International laws should be given priority.***
- ***The Ministry of Justice should take necessary steps in full implementation of The EAW law and Nikahnama (Marriage contract)***
- ***The Supreme Court and Ministry of Justice to take concrete steps to reform Judicial system and sensitization of law enforcement agency according to implement the commitment Afghanistan government has taken regarding women's humanrights.***
- ***The Ministry of Interior should revise its procedures on identity card and passport process to make it in line with the equality clause of the Afghan Constitutional***

Low Access to Education:

Low Access to Education is a concern underpinning women's inaccessibility to social development and economic empowerment. While the Afghan Government has made substantial progress in elementary **education**, where 6 million children are now attending school, without a doubt, there has been much progress following the fall of Taliban where less than 1 million children were enrolled in formal education. By 2008-09 school years, this number had surpassed 6 million, more than at any point in Afghanistan's history as described by Human Rights Watch.² However, another 6-7 million children who don't have access to school represents the enormous gap remaining to be addressed. Evidence shows that a majority of those who have no access are young girls. According to Ministry of Education (2007) the level of discrepancy between male and female students is visible

² Human Rights Watch, *We Have the Promises of the World: Women's Rights in Afghanistan*, December 2009, downloaded on 14 January 2010, http://www.hrw.org/en/node/86805/section/9#_ftn242, downloaded on 14 January 2009.

from grade three of elementary school where girl's attendance drops to 1/3 of the total school children's attendance.

According to the Ministry of Education (2007), there are huge discrepancies in secondary and higher education between male and female students. Among 271144, only 67900 girls have graduated from high school in same year. Large-scale studies show that achieving higher education reduces the incidences of child marriage, early pregnancy, and the risk of dying due to pregnancy-related causes. The lack of access to school and education has an extreme negative affect on women's socio-economic empowerment status. Female education in Afghanistan is a symbolic measure of Afghanistan's development progress and is absolutely essential to its future.³

Proposed Questions to the Government of Afghanistan

- ***What steps has the Government of Afghanistan taken to address the discrepancy between male and female students going to secondary and higher secondary schooling?***
- ***What measure has been taken to address the socio-cultural impediments of girls access to education?***
- ***After the increase in attacks on female teachers and students, what steps has the Government of Afghansitgan taken to improve the security of schools to protect girls' right to education in insecure areas and provinces of Afghanistan?***

The Afghan Government needs to address several issues such as insecurity, issues pertaining to women's and girls' rights in the family - such as early marriage, the cultural value system that gives low importance to women's rights and training of female teachers in order to improve access to education.

According to (MOWA, 2007) among the categories of violence, acts of violence toward girl students and female teachers are the highest number of incidences. In Southern and Eastern Afghanistan, insecurity, including targeted attacks against schools, teachers and students have severely hampered both girls' and boys' ability to complete education. The latest National Risk and Vulnerability Assessment (NRVA 2007/8) showed that between January 2006 and December 2008, 1153 attacks or threats towards the education sector in the country were reported.⁴ It was recorded that attacks have increased since late 2005 and almost tripled in 2008.⁵ The most affected provinces over the period are Kunar (95

³ Weaving Wisdom, Confronting Crisis, Forging Future: Afghanistan Non-Government report on the Beijing Platform of Action (2004-2009)

⁴ World Bank, IDA at Work in Afghanistan, *Expanding Access to Quality Education*, page21.

⁵ *Ibid*, page 21.

attacks), Khost (91), Ningarhar (74), and Helmand (72)⁶. Kabul, the capital of the country, with a record of 72 attacks,⁷ UNICEF recorded 292 attacks on schools and education facilities. As of the end of April 2009, UNICEF records showed that 29 schools have been attacked and as a result, some 700 schools have been closed because of which around 200,000 children cannot attend school.⁸ Schools located in insecure areas, particularly girls' schools, remain targets of insurgents.⁹

Clearly there are critical limits to girl's accessibility to education which the GoA must urgently address. According to an AWN led NGO consultation on Beijing+15 review¹⁰, among other impediments to girls' education, most of the participants cited that remote location of schools, particularly in rural areas, family decision that gives preferential support to boys' schooling, lack of qualified teachers, sexual harassment of students, especially amongst girls en route to school, and early marriages.

Equally important issues that need to be addressed are: lack of schools for children with disabilities and over-age students; increasing numbers of orphans that are not integrated into society; street children that cannot attend school because their families depend on them to earn income; and returning internally displaced children and illiterate adults that are not mainstreamed into their communities. According to South Asia regional director for UNICEF (Heart, 2010) "... with high child mortality rates, poor levels of nutrition and rampant sexual abuse Afghanistan is the most difficult place to be born as a child."

Proposed Recommendation to the Government

- ***The Ministry of Education should take practical steps in girls' accessibility to education, by emphasizing female teacher's training, proximity and location of school construction in villages to minimize the physical distance.***
- ***The Ministry of Interior should take practical steps in reducing security hazards around girls' schools particularly in east and south where girls' schools are under continuous attack.***
- ***Urge all parties to the conflict to respect IHL by not targeting schools and other public places and not obstructing children's access to schools***

⁶ *Ibid*, page 21.

⁷ *Ibid*, page 21.

⁸ Press Conference with Shigeru Ayoagi, UNESCO Country Director and Gopal Sharma Deputy Representative, 20 April 2009. Transcript available at www.unama.unmissions.org.

⁹ Weaving Wisdom, Confronting Crisis, Forging Future: Afghansitan Non-Government report on the Beijing Platform of Action (2004-2009)

¹⁰ On 17 August 2009, UN organizations in Afghanistan with mandates in gender programming supported the conduct of an NGO consultation to discuss the implementation and review of the BPFA+15.

Poor Health Status:

According to the UNDP Human Development reports (2004, 2007) Afghanistan has dropped from 173- 174 in 178 countries of the World, just above 4 other less developed African countries.¹¹ Life expectancy among women is as low as 44 year versus 45 years among men as per estimation of (2002) in contrast to most other countries of the world where women live longer than men. The collapse of health infrastructure coupled with social conservatism has had significant adverse effects on the reproductive health needs of the population, particularly women. Afghanistan has one of the highest maternal mortality ratios in the world, estimated at 1600 per 100,000 live births (Government of Afghanistan, 2009), On average 1 in 9 Afghan women will die in childbirth, giving Afghanistan the terrible distinction of having the highest maternal mortality rate in the world (UNFPA 2008). The data on under-five mortality rates is 230 per 1000 live births (Government of Afghanistan, 2009). The Afghanistan official report on the ESCR (2009) shows that two of the primary challenges facing the Ministry of Public Health (MoPH) are reducing both maternal and newborn mortality. Among the various challenges of the health sector is heavy reliance of the health budget on foreign aid, It is estimated that 90% MoPH's budget for public health sector is supported by international donor funds.

In addition to this, a John Hopkins sponsored national health service consumer survey revealed that the annual per capita "out-of-pocket" health care expenditure was roughly 28.5 USD. It was found out that over of a quarter of sick household members attested that health care costs placed an undue stress on their ability to maintain their households.¹²

In research on health issues conducted by the Asian Development Bank (ADB) and ACBAR¹³, most of the NGO's interviewed had identified five key priority issues that must be addressed in order to improve the health sector in Afghanistan. The issues are: (1) the overall capacity of the Ministry of Public Health, (2) the number of skilled health providers, (3) access to healthcare, (4) quality of healthcare provision, and (5) the public's knowledge and awareness of health issues. In the May 4th Consultation on ICESCR women added another overarching issue which impedes development in public health sector in Afghanistan, namely the increase in levels of corruption and the lack of a monitoring scheme on the private medical sector and

¹¹ <http://www.afghanconflictmonitor.org/2007/11/afghanistan-fif.html>

¹² http://www.jhsph.edu/publichealth/press_releasess/2007/Burnham_afghanistan.htm

¹³ In April 2008, ADB and ACBAR jointly sponsored a research advocacy paper titled NGO voices on health. The NGOs that were consulted include: Action Contre La Faim (ACF); Afghan Health and Development Services (AHDS); Agha Khan Health Service (AKHS); Bakhtar Development Foundation (BDF); CONCERN; Coordination for Humanitarian Assistance (CHA); IBNSINA; John Hopkins Program for International Education Gynecology Organization (JHPEIGO); John Hopkins School of Public Health (JHSPH); Management Sciences for Health (MSH); Medair; Merlin; Save The Children – US(SC-US); Swedish Committee of Afghanistan (SCA); STEP Health and Development Organization (STEP), and Terre Des Hommes (TDH).

NGOs providing health care as government contract in some of the Afghan provinces. According to NGO evidence of a recent visit to Badakhshan province, for instance, it was found that the only big governmental hospital run by NGO had dismissed all local doctors including female doctor and hired doctors from other countries.

Proposed Question to the government of Afghanistan

- ***What measure has the government taken to improve women access to health facilities in remote areas?***
- ***What measures has the government taken to raise public awareness about women's health issues, health education and harmful cultural practices which have detrimental impacts on women's health status ?***
- ***Regarding underage marriage and violence against women, what steps has the government taken to stop these harmful practices to improve women health status?***

Proposed Recommendation to the Government of Afghanistan

- ***The government should have longterm plan for public health which requires is funded by the national budget and resources and eventual withdraw from dependency on international aid.***
- ***The Ministry of Public Health should monitor the work of the private health sector as well the NGO sector to make sure the Afghan public have quality service and use of local expertise, where possible.***
- ***Considering the rural context of Afghanistan more emphasis on the training and education of female doctors and health personal from provinces should be given priorities***
- ***The government to take concrete measure of monitoring progress of women and children health, priority according to ministry of health.***

Work and Employment:

Based on Government survey the unemployment rate in Afghanistan is estimated to be 33 per cent. There is no clear indication of government programs which shows positive progress in this regard. Although there is benchmark of 30% of women in all ranks of civil service (which forms one of the biggest employment source in Afghanistan). in ANDS, the government has failed to show concrete progress toward this goal.

The government data on skills training and capacity building shows marked participation of women in the last few years. However, the quality of the training has been problematic and impact these trainings had in terms of increased women's employment has been limited, at best.¹⁴

There are an estimated 2 million war widows in Afghanistan.¹⁵ A government report on Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR) failed to include women as direct beneficiaries of the process in spite of women's suffering from armed conflict. Meanwhile there is no specific allocation to women heads of household in any of the government distributed township which are managed by Mujahideen leaders and commanders.

Recommendations to the Government of Afghanistan

- **All training and skill development programs should be evaluated in terms of impacts in helping women and men in finding employment**
- **There should be specific budget allocations by the International Community for the reintegration process as aftermath of London conference**

Poverty and the Right to an Adequate Standard of Living

In its response to the list of issues, the Government of Afghanistan has indicated that the ANDS is the plan of action to combat poverty, with the national budget including most priority pro-poor allocations and pro-poor expenditure tracking to ensure better targeting. (para. 58) However, it must be noted the ANDS does not explicitly recognize the international human rights framework. While there are benchmarks in the Economic and Social Development pillar that can contribute to the enjoyment of economic and social rights, they are not framed as legal entitlements and are certainly not comprehensive. In addition, the ANDS does not clearly indicate who the poor are, why they are poor and why they remain poor. This makes it extremely difficult to design, implement and monitor any policies and programmes that are said to have pro-poor orientation.

¹⁴ AIHRC shadow report on ICESCR (Nov, 2009)

¹⁵ Women and Men in Afghanistan: a handbook of baseline statistic

While the Government of Afghanistan has indicated that food poverty has been reduced from 42 per cent to 36 per cent, this fails to acknowledge that another 37 per cent of Afghans hover on the edge of absolute poverty, which makes them extremely vulnerable to any adverse event, such as illness or disasters. (See Oxfam International's 2008 Report "Rethinking Disasters: why death and destruction is not nature's fault but human failure), which points out that the poor, women, and marginalized minorities always bear the brunt of natural disasters.) The food poverty definition of poverty also fails to recognize that poverty is broader than how much it costs to provide food for the family. As stated by the Committee in 2001, poverty must be understood holistically, which includes considering how factors such as the abuse of power, insecurity, inequitable allocation of resources, lack of choice, and discrimination and exclusion, affect the enjoyment of human rights. As the March 2010 OHCHR report "the Human Rights Dimensions of Poverty in Afghanistan" states, these are all key drivers of poverty in Afghanistan.

AWN would like to highlight that while a significant proportion of Afghans are poor, using the Committee's definition, women are disproportionately impacted; with gender inequality the most marked form of inequality as well as the most pervasive. These inequalities are well demonstrated by data and development indicators regarding poverty reduction efforts to date. Such institutionalized and discriminatory norms and practices are reflected in the health, mortality rates, education and literacy concerns addressed in this report.

National Solidarity Program (NSP) and other National programs designed as government strategies to address rural poverty, need to improve women's participation in order to strengthen the gender dimension of poverty eradication in Afghanistan rural areas. Various studies, including the official reports, indicate the low participation women in NSP Community

Development Councils (CDC):¹⁶

The Afghanistan Government official report on ICESCR clearly indicates the corruption in land distribution inferring to the existence of a Land Mafia group and government failure to protect the rights of poor against powerful groups who illegally in Shirpur and other area of the Kabul city owns the housing scheme¹⁷. While the government has introduced new land policy it is important that women and other vulnerable groups have protection of law enforcement agencies regarding their legal entitlement to land and housing rights. Women heads of households, teachers and other vulnerable groups which have been identified by the government as eligible for land distribution and housing should be given housing in various housing scheme under land distribution quota, instead of one specific township in a distant area of Kabul where accessibility to their work is literally impossible

¹⁶ www.mrrd.gov.af/aird/Gender%20Mianstreaming.pdf

¹⁷ Shirpur area was evacuated in 2003 using police force and distributed among the powerful groups who build castle type housed in Kabul for more detail see Afghanistan ICESCR official report p.34-35

for them. In the workshop of May 4th the participant give the example of land given to female teachers in one of the distant areas of Kabul city which is making it difficult for any teacher to reach respective school in the morning.

Proposed Question to the Afghan Government:

- ***What are the GoA strategies/policies to measure adequate access of women and men to food, water, and sanitation or any progress in ANDS set benchmarks in absence of baseline gender segregated baseline data?***
- ***What laws and procedures are in place that will help bring the culprit of the land and housing corruption to justice?***
- ***What protection will be available to for women head of household and other vulnerable to group to enjoy their socio-economic rights under current power structure acting above***
- ***enforced law of the country as described in official report?***

Proposed Recommendations to the Government of Afghanistan:

- ***The Afghan Government should incorporate a multi-dimensional definition of poverty in the mid-point evaluation of ANDS and use the language of human rights to ensure that policy priorities and trade-offs in the ANDS are in line with human rights obligations.***
- ***The Government of Afghanistan must improve its existing indicators to include human rights and gender participation in process and outcomes, in order ensure a measureable impact of poverty reduction interventions on women, poor and vulnerable groups.***
- ***The Ministry of Finance (MoF) in line with Afghan government statement on pro-poor policy and establishment of gender budgeting unit to make sure that Afghan public have regular access to information on government progress according to its compliances. This should include information about the the flow of funds, expenditure on basic human rights and women rights priorities and needs from national to the sub-national levels***

List of NGOs and Individuals who endorsed this Report:NGOs

- **EVEN'S VISION ORGANIZATION**
- **AFGHAN WOMEN EDUCATION CENTER**
- **HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANT FOR WOMEN AND CHILDREN IN AFGHANSITAN**
- **FEMALE REHABILITATION DEVELOPMENT ORGANIZATION**
- **SUPPORTIVE ORGANIZATION FOR POOR WOMEN**
- **WOMEN RECONSTRUCTION AND CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATION**
- **KABUL ORTHOPEDIC ORGANIZATION**
- **NAHEED SHAHEED COOPERATION ORGANIZATION FOR AFGHAN WOMEN**
- **EDUCATIONAL AND TRAINING CENTER FOR POOR WOMEN AND GIRLS OF
AFGHANISTAN**
- **MODERN ORGANIZATION FOR DEVELOPMENT OF EDUCATION**
- **WOMEN AND CHILDREN LEGAL RESEARCH FOUNDATION**
- **AFGHAN WOMEN SKILLS DEVELOPMENT CENTER**
- **VOINCE OF WOMEN ORGANIZATION**
- **AFGHAN WOMEN RESOURCE CENTER**
- **WOMEN FOR AFGHAN WOMEN**
- **AFGHAN WOMEN RIGHTS ORGANIZATION**
- **WOMEN AND CHILDREN LEGAL RESEARCH FOUNDATION**

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