

CHILD ABUSE IN AFGHANISTAN



AFGHAN WOMENS NETWORK



RESEARCH STUDY REPORT
DECEMBER 2010

Background Introduction:

As part of its ongoing lobbying and advocacy efforts for women and children rights, AWN with the financial support of Save the Children initiated a pilot project at the national level in Afghanistan to advocate for greater protection mechanisms for children at risk. In 2008, as a joint response to increased reported incidents of rape and sexual abuse of children, AWN and its members established Advocacy Group for Prevention of Child Sexual Abuse and Child Rapes to function as a pressure group of the civil society organizations and children and women rights groups to raise national attention to the plight of children subject to sexual abuse and rape throughout Afghanistan. The efforts of the Advocacy Group convinced the First Vice President to establish a High Commission under his supervision to review and follow up cases of child rapes and sexual abuse through judiciary and other law enforcement mechanisms. The Commission had already developed a Ministerial Draft Plan in mid 2009 and identified a monitoring group to follow up and review the investigations and the processes to find and convict the perpetrators of such crimes.

However, due to the Presidential elections in late 2009 and the change of First Vice President, the Commission work has come to a halt, and AWN is striving with its members to lobby for the re-enactment of the Commission under the new First Vice President so that the Ministerial Draft Plan can be finalized, executed and monitored to assist hundreds of children awaiting for justice in Afghanistan.

Project Objectives:

As part of its partnership with Save the Children, AWN continued awareness raising, advocacy and studying the conditions of children at the national levels through its members and its field offices. Also throughout the life of the project, the implementing team struggled to gathered information on the challenges faced by children. An important aspect of the project was to conduct a " Research Study" for six months to find the flaws, loopholes, and shortcomings at the national level regarding child abuse.

This report is a consolidation of various primary and secondary sources of information regarding the conditions of children in Afghanistan and serves as an initial entry point for future programs on lobbying and advocacy for child rights. While reading this report, the challenges of data collection, access to the right kind of information, children's inabilities in expressing their views and opinions freely, and overall lack of statistical data on demographic factors in Afghanistan should be considered as the major challenges in field of assessment and research.

Summary:

"Children in Afghanistan are in terrible situation. There is no kindness towards them. They are trafficked, deprived of education, carry tough jobs and lose their families in war". Official from National Security Department, Nangrahar.

The conditions of children in Afghanistan are reflective of the overall social, political, economical and cultural crisis compounded in perpetual internal fighting throughout most parts of the country. According to 2007–2008 National Risk and Vulnerability Assessment¹, 36 percent of Afghans are not able to meet their basic needs of food, water, and shelter, which is more than a third of the general population. In such circumstances, when resources are dire and depleting for general population, children are bearing the harsher brunt due to social and cultural patriarchy that suppresses the rights of children.

As the war and insurgency has exacerbated and made its ways into Afghan villages, joblessness, loss of parents and relatives in suicide bombing and other incidents, have forced children into tough, illegal and implicit forms of labor to earn an income for themselves and their families. According to UNICEF Country Programme in 2010², 30 percent of children are involved in child labor and 43 percent of girls are married before they reach to the age of 18 years old.

The children, national and international civil society organizations, parents and teachers who were interviewed in this Research Study believe that unless the Afghan government does not take effective measures to implement its commitments and obligations under the Afghanistan Constitution, national and international commitments like the Convention on the Rights of Child (CRC) signed by Afghanistan in 1994, children in the country will continue suffering the most severe forms of violence and discrimination. Respondents believe that it is not enough to develop and enact the laws; families, communities, rural and urban demographics need a comprehensive national awareness raising programs on those laws and strategies on the rights and needs of children in Afghanistan.

This study indicates that children even in schools are not immune to the rampant institutional corruption and favoritism and almost 80 percent of the children interviewed said that they witness explicit bribery and corruption in their classes and students from rich families are respected, given high marks even though they do not work hard. Consequently, such mistreatment, injustices in the educational system has created huge despair and disdain among poor students which is one of the reasons of leaving school before they finish.

¹ Icon Institute (2007/08) National Risk and Vulnerability Assessment: Afghanistan Profile

² UNICEF Press Release on the launch of its 2010–2013 Country Programme dated 04 March 2010

The other major threat faced by children is the increased sexual abuse and rapes throughout Afghanistan. Children are subject to sexual assault, sexual abuse and rapes on the way to school, in their homes, in their villages by warlords, land lords, neighbors and even close relatives. Although, there has not been official rating of the ratio of sexual abuse of children in Afghanistan yet, organizations and activists interviewed for this Research raised concerns that some children are not even safe in their homes and are subject to sexual abuse. Such abuses are not reported to the police or media since children are threatened by the perpetrators and they remain silent and continue being the victim throughout their lives. According to the Juvenile Court, one of the reasons behind children escaping from homes is the potential threat of sexual abuse, or when they have been directly subject of sexual abuse and rapes in their homes, or by their close relatives. However, when children escape from homes, they face greater danger on the streets; they become victims of drug trafficking, drug addiction, more sexual abuse, forced begging, and other punishable crimes and when they are captured by the police, they are physically and psychologically abused under the custody of police and the Correction Centers.

The respondents repeatedly expressed that traditional practices are also harmful to children more than anyone else. In areas, where is less or no control of the central government, communal affairs, disputes are resolved through traditional mechanisms that are harmful, abusive and in clear violations of child rights in Afghan Constitution or other national and international mechanisms. In such settings, girls are not allowed to access education, even though there might be community-based education projects run by non-government organizations. Small girls are given in Baa'd to resolve family disputes by traditional Jirga's and they don't have access to health care even in critical health conditions. This is one of the reasons that Afghanistan has the world's second highest Mother's Mortality Rate since young girls are given to marriage in early age and they can not survive the complications of child birth, or at times denied access to health care before and during child birth.

While Afghanistan Constitution and Convention on the Right of Child provide clear direction and strategies on child protection, the respondents expect the central government to implement and create national awareness in rural and urban areas on child rights and protection measures for children at risk. Using the national and international instruments, AWN has been actively lobbying with government bodies, international and national organizations to increase and strengthen their efforts to protect children at risk in Afghanistan. **This report is dedicated to Hamida³ and hundreds of children who have been subject of sexual abuse and rapes throughout Afghanistan and an endeavor towards bringing the national and international attention to the plight of children in Afghanistan.**

³ Hamida, (name changed) was raped by her neighbor in Sare Pul in 2009 repeatedly until she was finally killed and thrown into a well in the neighborhood. Story narrated by a women's rights activist in Mazar e Sharif to AWN team.

Notes on Terminology:

Although the national laws in Afghanistan do not have any clear provision on specific age for being called a child, the article 70 of the Civil Code identifies marriage ages as 16 and 18 for girls and boys respectively. Therefore, marriages before ages of 16 and 18, or forced ones are subject to nullification and the perpetrators should be convicted to imprisonment for up to two years in jail.

However, the Convention on the Rights of Child (CRC) and its Optional Protocols claim that anyone under the age of 18 years, is a child and they come under the coverage and protection mechanisms recommended by the Convention.

Notes on Methodology:

The questionnaire, observations, interviews and literatures review of secondary data were utilized during a period of six months by AWN advocacy and program team to develop this Research Study. Around 81 questionnaires were filled by 4 different categories of respondents; children, national and international organizations, and women's rights groups. The author also carried 5 in depth interviews with leading women and human rights activists at the national level to assess the verify the information filled in the questionnaires. Questionnaires and interviews took place in Kabul, Nangrahar and Hirat provinces of Afghanistan in which AWN has a sub-office and many members active in those regions.

Table 1: Categories of Respondents

Categories	Total number	Females
Children	9	7
National and International Organizations	24	10
Teachers/Parents	31	23
Government Ministries/Departments	17	9
Total	81	60 %

As Table 1 indicates, the number of children who participated in the structured interviews using the Questionnaire is relatively small in comparison of other categories, which makes lesser than 12 % of the overall respondents. This is the due to the fact that children are generally reluctant to speak with strangers, or most importantly they are not allowed to spend time with anyone out of their schools or homes. Though, the research team tried to get permission of entry to schools, but they were not allowed by the schools administration to enter the schools and interview children.

The other challenges of the Research Study include children's inability in freely expressing their view points, children are scared to complain about their parents

due to fear of reprisal by their parents and relatives. Moreover, the teachers interviewed tried to manipulate the answers on questions related violence against children in schools, corruption and bribery of teachers and schools administration and of course lack of knowledge and awareness on the laws and policies around child rights in the country too overshadowed the responses of the people interviewed.

Children who filled in the Questionnaires and participated in the structured interviews were between ages of 12 to 18 and among grades 8 to 12 in their schools. Such a data sample indicates that they are aware of their own issues and well informed about the issues faced by other children in their vicinities. These children also mentioned that they were following up media stories and news about the children conditions throughout Afghanistan and were terrified about the sexual abuse and child rapes incidents broadcast by the media.

Major findings of the Research Study are explained in details below:

Afghan children under armed conflict:

850 children (under 5) die on an average base daily ⁴
Infant Mortality: 165/1000 in 2004
Estimated 74 % national net enrollment for boys, 46 % for girls, 11 % of boys & 5 % of girls enrolled in primary school continues to grade 12
Population in 2005, 23.5 million people, as of 2008, 46.5 % younger than 14
Gender-based violence prevalent. Rape affects girls, boys committed by criminal gangs, family members, care takers/guardian, relatives. No official data. Nearly half of marriages involve girls and boys under 18

From Watchlist Afghanistan Report 2010: Watchlist on Children and Armed Conflict

Almost all the respondents from the four categories expressed concerns that the conditions of children throughout Afghanistan have deteriorated in the past 5 years as the internal security worsened. There is a direct relationship between how children are treated and the security conditions of a community. Reports have indicated that when during suicide bombings, road-side attacks, air bombing and other security incidents, children and women are the primary victims. Most importantly, because they have limited access to safer places in their villages and also because children are stick to their mothers during times of fear and conflict. Since women in the villages cannot easily run from one place to another in the village to safeguard her life, their children too suffer together with them. According to Watchlist 2010 report⁵, only in 2009 at least 346 children were killed in air bombings, night raids, and special operations of international military forces as well as during the suicide bombing, road-side explosions and landmines instigated by the Taliban militants. Militants have targeted scores of schools, teachers, and students in different parts of Afghanistan as they are seen as supporters of Afghanistan's educational system run by the government.

It is worth nothing that the respondents believe post 2001 was a much awaited opportunity for Afghan children and they were able to access education, and some forms of health care due to the national coverage of Basic Health Package Services run by the Ministry of Public Health throughout the country. However, as the insurgency turned more violent towards end of 2006 and 2007, the conditions of children too became deteriorated, especially in areas under direct hostility between militants and national and international military forces.

As the fighting gets fierce and the local governments lose grounds in provinces, children are used in militant attacks as suicide bombers or in planting road side bombs. Many reports by the British forces in Helmand mention about children between ages of 9-15 years caught up during planting road side bombs to target the British forces. Some of these children are threatened to death by militants

⁴ UNICEF, http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/afghanistan_statistics.html

⁵ Watchlist on Children and Arm Conflict. Setting the Right Priorities: Protecting Children affected by Arm Conflict in Afghanistan, June 2010

to carry such acts, but some are also paid by the militants and children who are the solely bread winners of their families, welcome such an offer and engage in planting bombs.

The general consensus among all respondents indicate security and peace as the primary need of children in Afghanistan- they believe that if armed conflict comes to an end, their immediate threats will be removed.

Armed Conflict does not only pose immediate life threats to children and their families but also is a major obstacle on the way of addressing the basic human needs of children, like emergency aid for food, shelter, health care and etc. Watchlist reports that in 2009, around 43 percent of Afghanistan was entirely not able to receive any humanitarian aid. These areas included south, south-east and some parts of the western region, in which NGOs were not able to bring in the basic needs of people.

Human Rights Activists interviewed for this Research Study complain about the lack of serious response by the United Nations organizations, particularly when United Nations Assistance Mission has only one Child Rights Advisor as part of its mission. The Afghan government too fell short in immediate and long-term protection mechanisms for children; the 2009 presidential election used schools and health clinics and even hospitals as polling stations that came under attack by the militants.

Afghanistan has ratified Child Rights Convention (CRC) in 1994 and is bound to ensure that its social and legal services to children in general and children at risk are part of its government strategic policies, plans and programs. Fortunately, a positive and significant step was the first CRC report submitted by the Afghan government to the CRC Committee in 2009. The report talks about improvements, challenges and future plans to ensure that Afghanistan's social and legal mechanisms are responsive to the recommendations of the Convention and the CRC Committee.

United Nations Security Council Resolutions on Afghanistan regarding Child Rights:

The UN Security Council passed 27 resolutions on Afghanistan between 2001 and March 1, 2010 of which six specifically referred to children. These are 1419 (2002), 1833 (2008), 1806 (2008), 1868 (2009), 1890 (2009)

UN Security Council Resolutions on Children and Armed Conflict (CAC): 1882 (August 2009); 1612 (July 2005), 1539 (April 2004), 1460 (January 2003), 1379 (November 2001), 1314 (August 2000), 1261 (August 1999)

UN Security Council Working Group Conclusions on CAC in Afghanistan: S/AC.51/2009/1 (July 2009)

UNAMA sources

The Afghan Constitution too has important provisions for child protection. Article 54 of the Afghan Constitution says, *"Family forms the fundamental unit of the society, and is protected by the state. The state shall take the necessary measures to secure the physical and mental health of the family, mother and child in particular, to rear children, and to eliminate the traditions contrary to the sacred religion of Islam."*⁶

Furthermore, when UNICEF report that 30 percent of Afghan children are involved in child labor, there too Afghan Constitution article 49 has clear directions to the government to prohibit child labor. Article 49 says, *"Compulsory labour shall be proscribed. Active participation in states of war, calamity, and other states threatening the life and peace of the nation is among the fundamental duties of each Afghan. Child labour shall be prohibited."*

Following the Afghan Constitution, the government adopted the Juvenile Delinquency Law to protect the right of children who commit crimes and behave against the Afghan laws. The Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs also took the lead of a national strategy for the protection of children and has started its implementation in most of the safer provinces.

The majority of the respondents including the children interviewed believe that access to health and education should be considered as crucial to a child as access to food, water and shelter are non-disputable rights for every human and especially for children.

Health Rights:

Studies have shown that children who have health complications are mentally and psychologically troubled as well. While the Ministry of Public Health claims to

⁶ Official Translation of Afghan Constitution,

have national coverage for all Afghans in all provinces through its Basic Health Services Package, human rights and children organizations complain about the low quality of services, unhygienic treatment, and distant clinics as the important obstacles. Armed conflict and local fights too prohibit children's access to health care in conflict zones.

Afghan Constitution and the CRC have the following provisions for children right to health:

Afghan Constitution article 52: *"The state shall encourage and support, in accordance with law, the prevention and treatment of illnesses, and the provision of gratis health facilities for all nationals. The state shall take the necessary steps to promote sound physical education, and develop national and local sports."*

CRC, Article 24: *"States Parties recognise the right of the child to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of health and to facilities for the treatment of illness and rehabilitation of health. States Parties shall strive to ensure that no child is deprived of his or her right of access to such health care services."*

Some of the respondents from the national and international organizations as well as the Departments of Public Health in two provinces mentioned that there are traditional ways of child treatment, and families in the rural areas tend to treat their ill children with home-made medicines. Often, these medicines are prepared unhygienic ways and harm children more. Officials at the Departments of Public Health in Nangrahar for example, says that they found out that some families had sold parts of the body of their children to others in the civil hospital, however they couldn't confirm if they child was already dead or killed for such purpose.

Education Rights:

"Education is the right of all Afghan citizens, which shall be provided gratis up to the bachelor's degree level in state educational institutions by the state. The state shall design and implement effective programmes for the balanced generalisation of education in the entire country and the provision of compulsory secondary education, and shall pave the way for teaching mother tongues in areas where people speak in those languages." Article 43 of the Afghan Constitution

Access to education remains a dream for children living in armed conflict and in the past couple of years, Ministry of Education reports closure of over 300 schools in insecure areas. Children interviewed for this Research Study complained about rampant corruption, bribery and favoritism in their schools very explicitly and teachers take bribes from students to pass them or grant them high marks. More over, children also complained that teachers and even the administration of

their schools insult and threaten children from poor families and instead respect and recognize children from powerful and rich families. *A respondent quoted an incident in his school that a boy of 14 years was humiliated by the teacher and punished to stand on a table in the class, the boy couldn't control his urine and the son of a local commander made fun of him. While returning home, the boy attempted suicide and was never seen in the school again.*

Almost 85 % of the respondents confirmed that children are subject to physical and mental violence in their schools and the Ministry of Education has not able to address the situation in schools. Teachers beat students with sticks, make them stand on the table and made fun of, slap them, and call them with bad names in front of all students. Such mistreatment and injustices in schools have been among the main reasons that children abandon school and never return. Leaving school for such reasons are more prevalent among children between ages of 9 to 15 years as self-respect and personal dignity are very critical for such age group, said the teachers who were interviewed.

In the first ever CRC report, the Afghan government reports about its progress of creating educational opportunities for millions of children with having 6 million children going to school since 2002. However, the report too admits that children leave schools early during the primary and middle school due to insecurity, early and forced marriages, and also little boys are forced to harsh labor for income earning purposes. Some of the children, teachers and parents also complained that lack of educational materials, competent teachers, lack of female teachers, and lack of text books in schools have really disappointed children to a level that they don't value school education anymore.

Crimes against Children:

Although, children complain about mistreatment, violence and injustices of their parents, do not name them as crimes. While the Afghan Constitution, national laws and the international human rights instruments does not allow any form of violence against children and if violence takes place, the perpetrators are punished – but there is not a coherent agreement that violence against children is crime in Afghanistan. Some parents respondents claimed that they have to be strict and beat their children at times in order to discipline them. There are traditional beliefs that children have raw brains and they need to be under strict control and should be beaten if necessary so that they understand their roles and responsibilities. The Elimination of Violence against Women Law approved in late 2009, criminalizes every kind of discrimination and violence against women and girls and girl child under 18 years too can come under the protection and coverage of that law. The head of the Juvenile Court says that even though sometimes the main cause of a child's involvement in crimes and escape from home are domestic violence, but families have not realized that any kind of violence on children are harmful for their immediate and long-term personality growth.

Interestingly, children who were interviewed accepted that children are subject to domestic physical and psychological violence and but none of the children accepted that they had undergone violence in their own families. Such reluctance to be honest is due to fear and social pressure on children that they shouldn't disclose their family matters. Though, domestic violence is a very common phenomenon in afghan families and has got lethal forms from beating to even murder but still violence is not considered to be a criminal offense.

The Afghanistan civil and criminal codes too are ambiguous when it comes to domestic violence against children. There are provisions that prohibit 'zulm' and oppression on anyone but is not able to declare domestic violence against children a punishable crime.

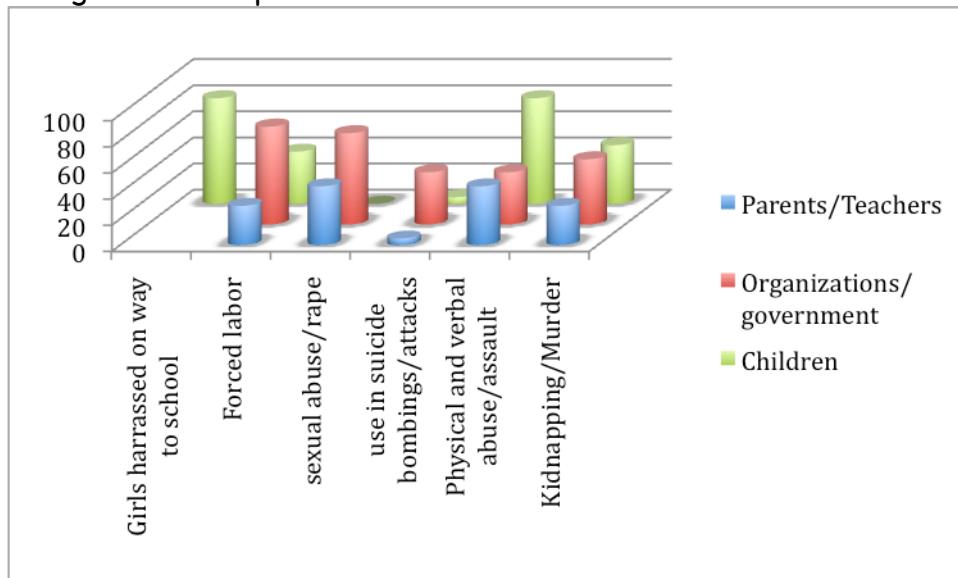
In spite of legal mechanisms, many children in Afghanistan are involved in forced labor and carry tasks that are harmful to their physical and psychological growth. Almost 100 percent of respondents blame poor economy and lack of employment opportunities for increased violence against children. Families whose heads do not have jobs or other means of income, force their children to work on the streets, sell plastic sheets and other stuff, cleaning and washing cars. Children are also made regular and full time workers in shops, buses and have to leave school to be able to perform their full time duties to earn an income. Parents and Teachers interviewed however differ slightly in such a claim and believe that at times when fathers become disabled in security incidents like suicide bombings, explosions and land mines, or when children lose their both parents, then they have no other option but to work for a living. As per the Minimum Age Convention, Afghanistan should establish clear criteria of employment age in both formal and informal sector, since children are mostly involved in forced labor in informal sector that has little or no control of the local government.

Children interviewed said that they are made to work for the family when their fathers or the main bread-winner of the family disappears or become disabled. Therefore, children spend most of the time at work and on the streets, and cannot pay attention to their studies and are mentally retarded due to the chaotic and troubled working environments on the streets and in black markets. Some of them have to leave school in order to be able to carry their jobs. The Human Rights Activists said that there are unconfirmed reports that families in dire need sell their children to the begging mafia groups who use small children for begging on the streets. The Council of Cabinet announced a plan to gather all beggars from Kabul streets and create job opportunities and shelter for them, but the relevant bodies have not yet executed the announced plan.

CRC in its article 32 makes the states responsible to assign age limits for employment that shouldn't be below 15 years of age and the state is responsible

to regulate working hours, environments and working conditions to ensure that children are not involved in harsh labor work.

Graph below indicates the kinds of crimes against children identified by different categories of respondents:



The above graph on the kinds of crimes against children, children have included harassment of girls on the way to school as a crime that is against children and such treatment causes many girls to stop going to school. Though this practice has been common in Afghanistan, says a head teacher in Kabul but in the recent years, the sons of powerful men and warlords have created so much trouble for girls and even harass small boys on the way to school. There are incidents in which if students have competition among each other in school, they establish gangs outside schools and beat and even kill their school competitors.

List of Conventions, treaties signed by Afghanistan related to child protection/ human rights since 1956

1. Convention on the Rights of Child ratified in 1994.
2. Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of Children in Armed Conflict, Acceded in 2003.
3. Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography, Acceded in 2002.
4. The Geneva Conventions 1, 2, 3, and 4 (of 1949) ratified in 1956.
5. Protocol 1 of the Geneva Conventions, Relating to the Protection of the Victims of International Conflicts Acceded in 2009.
6. Protocol 2 of the Geneva Conventions, relating to the Protection of Victims of Non-International Armed Conflict, Acceded in 2009.
7. Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, Acceded in 1956.
8. Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women ratified in 2003.
9. International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights, Acceded in 1983.
10. Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, ratified in 1987.
11. International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, Acceded in 1983.
12. Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, Acceded in 2005.
13. Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees, Acceded in 2005.
14. Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines and on their Destruction, Acceded in 2002.
15. Convention on Cluster Munitions, signed in 2008.
16. Rome Statue of he International Criminal Court, Acceded in 2003.

From Watchlist Afghanistan Report 2010: Watchlist on Children and Armed Conflict

Conclusion:

This Research Study has been a pilot initiative to identify the major challenges and threats faced by children in Afghanistan. It is also an attempt by AWN to engage its members and civil society organizations into long-term advocacy and lobbying interventions for the protection of children. While children have numerous challenges in Afghan society, this Research Study has only focused on some of them as entry points for national policies and programs for child rights. Therefore, this report in no means is a comprehensive analysis of children conditions in Afghanistan but rather issues discussed required more in-depth and long term analysis and research particularly considering a wider geographic location.

- ⇒ The Research Study identifies economic poverty at the community and household levels as the immediate and major threat to the well being of children in Afghan society. Considering the fact that huge number of population living under one dollar a day, children bear the harshest brunt of such economic crisis at the household levels.
- ⇒ Laws, policies, programs exist and new ones have been established, but there has not been any attention in awareness raising and enforcement of those mechanisms. Afghan government has signed numerous human rights treaties and conventions to please the international community, but none have drastically impacted the plight of children nor there has been any systematic legislative reform to conform to the international standards for human rights and child rights.
- ⇒ Children are not safe even in their homes, reports of sexual abuse, assault and mental torture against children inside closed doors and there has not been any response by the law enforcement agencies.
- ⇒ Children have been harmed by opposing sides of insurgency, both by government and international military forces, as well as the Taliban militants. International Humanitarian Law has been violated numerous times and there has not been any follow up by the United Nations or the Afghan governments on the reports of such violations, like children killed and disabled during military operations, night raids and aerial bombings.
- ⇒ UNAMA Human Rights and the UN Country Task Force on Monitoring and Reporting (CTFMR) mandated by the UN Security Council Resolution 1612 (2005) have not been able to bring in the agenda of child rights in the national priority programs and policies of the Afghan government.
- ⇒ Sexual exploitation of boys under the name of 'Bachabaazi' is a common practice in many parts of the country. The last visit of the United Nations Special Representative stressed on the prosecution and follow up of such crimes, and the Ministry of Justice, Defence, and Hajj had promised to follow up with religious clerics, civil society organizations and human rights groups to work towards eliminating such practices. However, there has not been any follow up of such commitments.

Recommendations:

For the Afghan Government, international community, human rights and civil society organizations:

- ⇒ Along with Afghanistan National Development Strategy (ANDS) Afghan government should clarify its position on child rights, assigning it as a top national priority. ANDS should develop clear benchmarks and indicators incorporating the provisions from Afghan Constitution, CRC and other United National Security Council Resolutions to address child protection and respond to the needs of children at risk.
- ⇒ The United Nations Working Group on Children in Armed Conflict chaired by UNAMA should follow up on the commitments of the Afghan government and international community during the February visit of the Special Representative on Children in Armed Conflict.
- ⇒ UNAMA should ensure that there is an adequate aid allocation to the needs and priorities of children, child rights organizations and prioritize programs and projects for immediate protection of children at risk.
- ⇒ Afghan government should establish an Directorate on Child Rights and ensure that it gets sufficient political and financial authority to execute policies, plans and programs for child protection. Civil Society organizations, human rights activists and women rights groups need to put pressure on the government for the establishment of such a Directorate.
- ⇒ Reports on the international military forces violations of International Humanitarian Law targeting children should be investigated transparently and independently by rights groups and Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission and ensure that perpetrators are identified and cases are investigated.
- ⇒ The High Commission on the Prevention of Child Sexual Abuse and Child Rapes should be re-enacted under the supervision of the new Vice President and the pending Ministerial Draft Plan should be discussed, executed and monitored by AWN and other members of civil society in that Commission.
- ⇒ Donors should support and provide adequate funding to the implementation of Child Protection Action Networks (CPAN) to respond to the growing needs of children under violence and children at risk.
- ⇒ International and national human rights organizations, womens groups should ensure that child rights awareness and protection programs are longer term and sustainable and should address the main causes of children issues in Afghanistan. Shelters and vocational skills programs should be prioritized for street children also to prevent them from getting into crimes.
- ⇒ The Afghanistan Peace and Reintegration Plan should have clear components of support to the children in re-integrated communities and protect children from insurgent targets in the re-integrated communities.

Assistance to IDPS and Refugees should include direct incentives and packages for children and their special needs.

- ⇒ Donors should increase funding for health care project to reduce child mortality and maternal mortality rates including programs for psycho-social care for traumatized children in immediate armed conflict zones.
- ⇒ National Police and National Army should receive regular training on the threats faced by children, gender-based violence against children. Ministry of Interior, Ministry of Defence and the National Directorate of Security should work with the UN Working Group on Children in Armed Conflict chaired by UNAMA to receive technical support and coordination. Civil Society organizations and child rights organizations too can be important resources in such a plan for awareness raising on child rights.
- ⇒ Ministry of Education should have student-centered complaint system so that students can report on corruption, bribery and favoritism of their teachers and school administration in a manner so that their identities could be kept confidential. Establishing hotline numbers could be a start towards such a system in which students can complain about their issues in schools to responsible departments at Ministry of Education.
- ⇒ Ministry of Health should establish separate departments for victims and survivors of gender based violence (rapes, sexual abuse, beatings, trauma and etc) and publicize the existence of such mechanisms for children and their families.
- ⇒ Ministry of Justice, the Juvenile Court, Juvenile Correction Centers should develop a systematic response to reports of rape and other forms of gender based violence against children. This should include the presence of family response units with adequate female staff and facilities, training of law enforcement officials (judges, prosecutors and police), adequate psycho-social and medical support, and the provision of shelters throughout the country where women, girls and boys can be safe from violence and abuse.
- ⇒ Ministry of Justice, Labor and Social Affairs, Attorney General, Juvenile Court, Ministry of Public Health should ensure and facilitate access for survivors of gender based violence especially rape victims to formal legal mechanisms that treat survivors with dignity throughout the justice process, protect and provide redress for their suffering and bring perpetrators to justice, in accordance with UN Security Council Resolutions 1820 and 1888.
- ⇒ The UN Country Team in Afghanistan, under the leadership of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General (SRSG), should commit staff and resources to prioritize child protection within their respective agencies, including the full implementation of Security Council Resolutions 1612 and 1882.

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