



Gender

May 2012



PHOTO: USAID/AFGHANISTAN

One of 90 women agribusiness entrepreneurs from Nangahar Province operates a vegetable seedling nursery, which supplies commercial farmers. This program is one of several USAID programs that integrate women into the agricultural value chain.

GENDER SNAPSHOT

- More than 525,000 women and children receive health treatment monthly
- Over a hundred thousand micro finance loans worth \$85.7million have been extended to women
- More than 1700 midwives trained and represent over 50 percent of active midwives in the country
- Providing literacy and numeracy skills training to more than 94,000 (62 percent female) in 20 provinces

Data as of May 2012

OVERVIEW

Long-excluded from education, healthcare, employment, and participation in public life, Afghan women continue to suffer from isolation, illiteracy, poor health and extreme poverty. The U.S. Government is committed to removing constraints on women's potential not only because it is the right thing to do but because their contributions to Afghan society are essential.

INCREASING ACCESS TO HEALTHCARE

Afghan women suffer from extremely high rates of maternal mortality, malnutrition, anemia, post-war trauma, and clinical depression. Nearly 60 percent of the population now lives within two hours walking distance to the nearest health facility, up from nine percent in 2002. USAID projects bring basic health and hospital services to women in 13 provinces. These projects provide maternal healthcare and immunizations, fight malnutrition and communicable diseases, diagnose and treat mental health problems and disabilities, and provide essential medicines.

Infant and child mortality rates have fallen 22 percent and 26 percent respectively since 2002. Support for midwifery education has helped to reduce maternal mortality. More than 1,753 midwives have been trained in USAID-supported projects representing approximately 55 percent of all active midwives in the country. USAID activities aim to increase the number of female healthcare workers and promote women's entry into medical fields. As a result, the percentage of USAID-funded healthcare facilities reporting at least one female healthcare worker has risen from 26 percent in 2002 to approximately 85 percent in 2010.

DEVELOPING ECONOMIC GROWTH OPPORTUNITIES

Although women make up 35.8 percent of the country's labor force, less than one percent has access to financial services. Many women work in the informal sector and are denied access to their own incomes. Increasing women's economic empowerment is a focus of USAID assistance, with \$3.5 million dispersed in micro-credit loans to women's businesses, fostering social participation as well as increasing knowledge and skills. USAID supported 2,300 women-owned enterprises, helped establish 400 new businesses, and trained more than 5,000 women in local handicrafts, value-chain and fine-arts businesses. Female entrepreneurs also receive assistance in horticulture, food processing, veterinary science and cashmere harvesting.

Women comprise 60 percent of the country's agricultural workforce. USAID established 3 Farm Service Centers specifically for women. The Kabul Center serves approximately 10,000 female farmers, and the Balkh and Parwan Centers are expected to benefit 6,000 by the end of 2012.

Twenty-five female agricultural master trainers were taught to train female farmers, and agricultural programs were established in four schools. USAID funds diverse agricultural programs to increase women's participation in agribusinesses. The U.S. also creates opportunities for women who must work from home and provides marketing services for their products.



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Gender (continued)



PHOTO: USAID/AFGHANISTAN

Girls now account for 35 percent of the six million students enrolled in school. Girls were barred from formal education during Taliban rule.



PHOTO: USAID/AFGHANISTAN

Since 2002, USAID has trained more than 707 female journalists, strengthening the independent media network across the country.

INCREASING LITERACY AND EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES

Since 2002, Afghanistan has made remarkable gains in increasing girls' access to education, which essentially was zero during Taliban rule. In 2010, 37 percent of the seven million children attending grades one to 12 are female. Despite remarkable gains in girls' (and boys') education, a huge gap remains in the country's ability to provide quality education to its female population. Nearly 90 percent of rural Afghan women are illiterate.

USAID's education projects invest in teacher training for women, development and printing of materials and textbooks that portray women in non-traditional ways and school security enhancements, as well as basic furnishings to facilitate girls' attendance. Community-based education classes have benefitted 70,000 girls and 390 female teachers in remote areas. Literacy and numeracy skills training has reached more than 94,000 (62 percent female) in 20 provinces. USAID has built or refurbished more than 680 schools since 2002, about 10 percent of which are girls-only schools.

SUPPORTING WOMEN'S RIGHTS

Women have long been restricted from public life in Afghanistan, even though the constitution protects them. Afghan women have limited awareness of their rights, and the formal justice system has limited reach outside of urban centers. To promote change, USAID provides women's-rights awareness training for female law students and judges, sponsors roundtables to promote public debate and dialogue on women's rights, helps build their skills to influence public policy and reform advocacy efforts, supports equal voter registration outreach, assists women candidates, and promotes gender equality in political parties. USAID trains female judges to officiate over the courts, manage cases, and provide due process. Additionally, USAID has provided news-media training to more than 820 female journalists, 720 executive staff women, 1,280 civil-society organization (CSO) members, and 166 national legislators across the country. USAID initiatives have helped shape gender-related legislation such as the law for the Elimination of Violence Against Women.

HELPING WOMEN PARTICIPATE IN CIVIL SOCIETY

Women and Stabilization Programs

USAID has pioneered non-traditional approaches to engaging women at the community level to ensure they benefit from village-based programs as well as men. Through the Community Development Program (CDP), USAID hired over 4000 women to participate in building refurbishment work in the In the southern, eastern and western regions of the country, In addition, nearly a million women have benefitted directly or indirectly from community stabilization grants.

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