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## Unleashing the Potential of Afghan Women: Strides, Challenges, and Pathways to Prosperity in Economic Development

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### ABSTRACT

*The role of Afghan women in economic development is essential for overall growth and prosperity. Despite numerous challenges, women have made significant strides in various sectors, including education, healthcare, government, media, and entrepreneurship. Their increased workforce participation strengthens the economy and empowers women. Afghan women's entrepreneurship and small businesses contribute to the informal sector's growth, generating income, creating jobs, and reducing poverty. Access to education equips women with the knowledge and skills necessary for economic participation and leadership roles. Financial inclusion efforts aim to provide women with access to banking, credit, and savings, empowering them economically. In rural areas, women play a vital role in agriculture and rural development, contributing to food security and economic growth. Afghan women actively participate in policy and advocacy, promoting gender equality, economic empowerment, and improved access to resources. They also serve as role models and mentors, inspiring and guiding younger generations. However, challenges such as cultural barriers, gender-based violence, limited resources, and security concerns persist. Achieving gender equality and empowering women economically requires sustained efforts from the government, civil*

*society organizations, and international partners. By addressing these challenges and creating an enabling environment, Afghan women can continue to drive transformative economic development.*

**Keywords: Afghan women, Economic Development, Workforce participation, Entrepreneurship, Gender equality**

### INTRODUCTION

The role of Afghan women in economic development is a critical factor for the overall growth and prosperity of Afghanistan. Despite numerous challenges and obstacles, Afghan women have made remarkable progress in various sectors of the economy over the past few decades. Their active participation and contributions have positively impacted sectors such as education, healthcare, government, media, and entrepreneurship, thereby strengthening the country's economy as a whole. One of the key aspects of women's role in economic development is their increasing workforce participation. Afghan women are increasingly joining the formal workforce, which not only empowers them but also contributes to economic productivity and growth. They have made significant inroads into various sectors, bringing their skills and talents to areas such as

education,<sup>86</sup> healthcare, government, media, and entrepreneurship. This surge in workforce participation has a positive ripple effect on the overall economy, creating employment opportunities and driving economic growth. Entrepreneurship and small businesses also play a vital role in the economic development of Afghanistan, and Afghan women have demonstrated remarkable resilience in this aspect.<sup>87</sup> They have shown determination by establishing and managing their own businesses, contributing to the growth of the informal sector, which holds a significant share in the Afghan economy. By starting small businesses, Afghan women not only generate income for themselves but also create job opportunities for others and contribute to poverty reduction.<sup>88</sup> Access to education is a fundamental component of women's empowerment and economic development. Afghan women have made significant strides in accessing education, with a growing number pursuing higher education and professional degrees.<sup>89</sup> Education equips women with the necessary knowledge and skills to actively participate in economic activities and take up leadership roles. By investing in women's education, Afghanistan enables them to contribute more effectively to the country's economic growth and development. Financial inclusion is another crucial aspect of women's economic empowerment.<sup>90</sup> Ensuring that women have access to financial services such as bank accounts, credit, and savings is essential for their economic independence. Efforts are being made to enhance financial

<sup>86</sup> Sayed Quadrat Hashimy, 'Mapping the Paradigm of Disabilities in Afghanistan from the Lens of Law and Policy' (2023) 6 Asian Journal of Humanities and Social Studies 51.

<sup>87</sup> Sayed Quadrat Hashimy and Jackson Simango Magoge, 'Role of WTO in the Promotion of Trade and IPR in Afghanistan' [2021] Dynamic Research Journals (DRJ) Journal of Economics and Finance (DRJ-JEF) Volume 01.

<sup>88</sup> 'The Impact of Social Media on Afghanistan's Tourism Industry: A Roadmap for the Future in the Internet Highway' <[https://scholar.google.com/citations?view\\_op=view\\_citation&hl=en&user=\\_XhWcpEAAAAJ&cstart=20&pagesize=80&citation\\_for\\_view=\\_XhWcpEAAAAJ:7ioeYXKzaWoC](https://scholar.google.com/citations?view_op=view_citation&hl=en&user=_XhWcpEAAAAJ&cstart=20&pagesize=80&citation_for_view=_XhWcpEAAAAJ:7ioeYXKzaWoC)> accessed 2 June 2023.

<sup>89</sup> Katharine Adeney, 'Constitutional Design and the Political Salience of "Community" Identity in Afghanistan: Prospects for the Emergence of Ethnic Conflicts in the Post-Taliban Era' (2008) 48 Asian Survey 535.

<sup>90</sup> Berkley Center for Religion Affairs Peace and World, 'Islam, Politics, and the Future of Afghanistan' <<https://berkeleycenter.georgetown.edu/posts/islam-politics-and-the-future-of-afghanistan>> accessed 28 May 2023.

inclusion for Afghan women, allowing them to save, invest, and access capital for entrepreneurial activities. By providing financial resources and opportunities, women can further contribute to economic development and achieve greater financial security.<sup>91</sup>

In rural areas, where the majority of the Afghan population resides, women play a pivotal role in agriculture and rural development. They engage in farming, livestock rearing, and other agricultural activities, which contribute to food security and stimulate rural economic growth. Their active involvement in these sectors helps improve the living standards of rural communities and strengthens the overall economy of the country.<sup>92</sup>

Furthermore, Afghan women are actively engaged in policy discussions and advocacy efforts to promote gender equality, women's rights, and women's economic empowerment. They strive to influence policies that address the barriers and challenges faced by women, advocating for equal pay, improved access to resources, and increased opportunities for economic advancement. By participating in policy development and advocating for change, Afghan women are shaping the future of economic development in the country.

Successful Afghan women serve as role models and mentors for younger generations. They inspire and guide other women, providing them with the necessary guidance, support, and encouragement to pursue education, careers, and entrepreneurship. These role models play a crucial role in empowering and motivating Afghan women to overcome obstacles and realize their full potential.<sup>93</sup> Despite the significant advancements made by Afghan women, it is important to acknowledge the

<sup>91</sup> Sayed Quadrat Hashimy and Nyamwero Nyamwero, 'The Anti-Competitive Effect of Mergers on Competition in Tanzania and India' [2022] SSRN Electronic Journal.

<sup>92</sup> 'A Tale of Two Tax Systems: A Comparative Analysis of General Anti-Avoidance Rules Provisions in India and Australia' <[https://scholar.google.com/citations?view\\_op=view\\_citation&hl=en&user=\\_XhWcpEAAAAJ&cstart=20&pagesize=80&citation\\_for\\_view=\\_XhWcpEAAAAJ:aXQ7jtEqGowC](https://scholar.google.com/citations?view_op=view_citation&hl=en&user=_XhWcpEAAAAJ&cstart=20&pagesize=80&citation_for_view=_XhWcpEAAAAJ:aXQ7jtEqGowC)> accessed 2 June 2023.

<sup>93</sup> Adeney (n 6).

persistent challenges they face. Cultural barriers, gender-based violence, limited access to resources, and security concerns continue to hinder women's progress. Achieving gender equality and empowering women economically necessitates sustained efforts from the government, civil society organizations, and international partners. By addressing these challenges and creating an enabling environment, Afghan women can continue to play a transformative role in the economic development of the country, driving growth, and fostering prosperity.<sup>94</sup>

### THE EVOLVING FASHION INDUSTRY IN AFGHANISTAN

The fashion industry in Afghanistan has seen significant growth and development in recent years. Despite the challenges posed by the country's socio-political situation, Afghan designers and entrepreneurs have been able to showcase their talent and creativity on both local and international platforms.<sup>95</sup> One of the key factors driving the growth of the fashion industry in Afghanistan is the increasing demand for contemporary and traditional Afghan clothing. Designers are incorporating traditional Afghan elements into modern designs, creating unique and culturally rich fashion pieces. Traditional garments like the Yakhan Qasemi Tanban shirts, Afghan dresses, and intricate embroidery are being reimagined to cater to the evolving tastes and preferences of the Afghan population.

Fashion shows and exhibitions have become more common in major Afghan cities, providing a platform for designers to showcase their collections. These events not only promote Afghan fashion but also provide opportunities for networking, collaboration, and business development within the industry.<sup>96</sup> Furthermore,

the rise of social media and e-commerce has played a significant role in promoting Afghan fashion globally. Afghan designers and brands are able to reach a wider audience and showcase their collections online, enabling them to connect with international buyers and consumers. This has opened up new avenues for exporting Afghan fashion and contributing to the country's economy. Additionally, there has been a growing emphasis on sustainable and ethical fashion practices in Afghanistan. Designers are incorporating traditional craftsmanship and locally sourced materials, promoting environmentally friendly practices and supporting local artisans.<sup>97</sup> This focus on sustainability aligns with the global trend in the fashion industry and has garnered attention from international fashion enthusiasts. Despite the progress, the fashion industry in Afghanistan still faces challenges, including limited access to resources, infrastructure, and skilled labor. However, with the determination and creativity of Afghan designers, as well as the support from the government and international organisations, the industry continues to evolve and contribute to the cultural and economic development of Afghanistan.<sup>98</sup>

### THE MEN'S FASHION MARKET

The men's fashion industry in Afghanistan has experienced notable growth and transformation in recent years. Despite the challenges posed by the country's socio-political situation, Afghan designers and entrepreneurs have been able to showcase their creativity and redefine men's fashion on both local and international platforms. Traditional Afghan clothing for men, such as the Turban shirts and Pashtun attire, has been revitalised with modern twists. Designers are incorporating contemporary elements and innovative designs, while still preserving the cultural heritage and authenticity of Afghan fashion. Fashion shows

<sup>94</sup> José Antonio Cheibub, Zachary Elkins and Tom Ginsburg, 'Beyond Presidentialism and Parliamentarism' (2014) 44 *British Journal of Political Science* 515.

<sup>95</sup> Sayed Quadrat Hashimy, 'The Doctrine of Copyright Exhaustion In Software Under Indian Copyright Act: A cursory Glance' [2022] SSRN Electronic Journal.

<sup>96</sup> Sayed Quadrat Hashimy, 'An Analysis of Naked Licensing in the Case of Trademark Law in the U.S., U.K. And India' (2022) 3 *Netherlands Yearbook of International Law* 1.

<sup>97</sup> Sayed Quadrat Hashimy, 'An Analysis of Naked Licensing in the Case of Trademark Law in the U.S., U.K. And India' (3 January 2022) <<https://papers.ssrn.com/abstract=3999020>> accessed 2 June 2023.

<sup>98</sup> agroformación, 'Afganistán ya tiene su "McDonalds" nativo' (*EFE.Agro*, 12 November 2013) <<https://efeagro.com/afganistan-ya-tiene-su-mcdonalds-nativo-2/>> accessed 1 June 2023.

and events dedicated to men's fashion have gained popularity in major Afghan cities, providing a platform for designers to exhibit their collections exclusively for men. These showcases not only promote Afghan men's fashion but also foster networking opportunities and business collaborations within the industry. The rise of social media and e-commerce has played a significant role in boosting the visibility and accessibility of Afghan men's fashion globally. Afghan designers and brands are leveraging digital platforms to reach a wider audience, connect with international consumers, and showcase their unique creations. This has opened up new avenues for exporting Afghan men's fashion and contributing to the country's economy.<sup>99</sup>

There is a growing emphasis on personalized and tailored menswear, catering to the evolving tastes and preferences of Afghan men. Bespoke services and made-to-measure options are becoming increasingly popular, allowing men to express their individual style and create a distinct fashion identity. Despite the progress, challenges such as limited access to resources, infrastructure, and skilled labor remain obstacles for the men's fashion industry in Afghanistan. However, with the passion, talent, and determination of Afghan designers and the support of the government and international organizations, the industry continues to evolve, empowering Afghan men to embrace fashion as a means of self-expression and contributing to the overall growth of the country's fashion landscape.<sup>100</sup> In this context, Let's discuss some of the Yakhan dozi;

Yakhan Qasimi Tanban shirt,<sup>101</sup> also known as "Kamiz," is indeed one of the most popular traditional Afghan clothing styles. It is a significant part of Afghan culture, reflecting the country's rich heritage and identity. When you enter gatherings in Afghanistan, you will witness a diverse range of clothing that showcases the beauty and uniqueness of Afghan traditional attire. The Yakhan Qasemi Tanban shirt is a historically and culturally significant traditional Afghan garment. Worn by both men and women, it is made of high-quality fabric, often handwoven and adorned with intricate embroidery and vibrant patterns.<sup>102</sup> The loose and comfortable fit, long sleeves, and decorated collar and cuffs add to its appeal. The embroidery designs are inspired by nature, and the fabric is carefully chosen for durability. The shirt represents Afghan identity, tradition, and artistry. It has gained popularity internationally, becoming a sought-after cultural garment. The term "Yakhan Qasemi" originated from a historical story of love and determination.

<sup>99</sup> Sandra Fredman, 'Challenging the Divide: Socio-Economic Rights as Human Rights' in Sandra Fredman (ed), *Comparative Human Rights Law* (Oxford University Press 2018) <<https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780199689408.003.0003>> accessed 19 May 2023.

<sup>100</sup> Elizabeth Katz, 'Women's Involvement in International Constitution-Making', *Feminist Constitutionalism: Global Perspectives* (Cambridge University Press 2012) <<https://enalsar.informaticsglobal.com:2156/core/books/feminist-constitutionalism/womens-involvement-in-international-constitutionmaking/1950B2A6CB04C8F69B8488300C9DC121>> accessed 19 May 2023.

خانم صادقی. 'پیراهن تنبان یخن قاسمی | یخن قاسمی - فروشگاه کالاهای افغانستانی | مجله May 2021' *فروشگاه کالاهای افغانستانی*, 19 'هنری حامی فرهنگ و هنر افغانستان' <<https://khamakshop.com/پیراهن-تنبان-یخن-قاسمی-یخن-قاسمی/>> accessed 1 June 2023.

<sup>102</sup> رادیو آزادی. 'یخن‌هایی خامک‌دوزی، هنر زنان هرات که هنوز هم طرفداران زیادی دارد' <<https://da.azadiradio.com/a/31180554.html>> (17:51:19Z) رادیو آزادی accessed 1 June 2023.



Figure II<sup>103</sup>

In the context of needlework, Afghan women and girls use their creativity and taste to embroider on fabrics like linen, silk, cotton, and wool. This needlework is widely used in decorating the Men's Tunban shirts, enhancing their beauty and elegance. The finger art of the women from this region adds a polished and refined touch to the shirts adorned with Yakhan Qasemi embroidery. There are different types of embroidery that are commonly used in traditional Afghan clothing, which may also be applied to Turban shirts:

### Herati Embroidery

Herati embroidery is a popular style of embroidery in Afghanistan. It is characterized by delicate geometric patterns, usually created with silk threads on a cotton or silk fabric. The motifs often include interconnected diamond shapes, rosettes, and floral designs.<sup>104</sup>

<sup>103</sup> عکس نوری، 21) 'مدیریت، عکس پیراهن قاسمی (21

<<https://fa.nody.ir/عکس-پیراهن-قاسمی/>> accessed 1 June 2023.

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<<https://khamakshop.com/%D9%BE%DB%8C%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%87%D9%86-%D8%AA%D9%86%D8%A8%D8%A7%D9%86-%DB%8C%D8%AE%D9%86-%D9%82%D8%A7%D8%B3%D9%85%DB%8C-%DB%8C%D8%AE%D9%86-%D9%82%D8%A7%D8%B3%D9%85%DB%8C/>> accessed 1 June 2023.



### Guldozi Embroidery

Guldozi embroidery is another traditional Afghan embroidery technique. It features intricate floral and vine motifs, often stitched with colorful silk threads. This type of embroidery is known for its fine detailing and is commonly used on various garments, including shirts and shawls.<sup>105</sup>



### Kandahari Embroidery

Kandahari embroidery originates from the city of Kandahar in Afghanistan. It is recognized for its bold and vibrant designs, typically featuring large floral motifs and decorative elements. Kandahari embroidery is often done with bright threads on dark-colored fabrics, creating a striking contrast. Kandahari embroidery is a traditional embroidery style originating from the city of Kandahar in Afghanistan. It is renowned for its bold and vibrant designs, which typically feature large floral motifs and decorative elements.

Kandahari embroidery is characterized by its use of bright and contrasting colors, creating eye-catching designs. The motifs often include

<sup>105</sup> آزادی (n 19).

flowers, leaves, vines, and geometric patterns. Gold and silver threads are sometimes incorporated to add a touch of elegance and richness to the embroidery.

This style of embroidery is predominantly done on fabrics such as silk, cotton, and velvet, using a combination of stitching techniques such as chain stitch, satin stitch, and couching. Skilled artisans meticulously handcraft each design, paying close attention to detail and ensuring precision in their work.

Kandahari embroidery is widely used in various traditional Afghan garments, including women's dresses, shawls, scarves, and even decorative items such as cushions and wall hangings. It serves as a significant cultural and artistic expression, showcasing the beauty and craftsmanship of Afghan artisans.

The popularity of Kandahari embroidery has extended beyond Afghanistan, with its unique and intricate designs capturing the attention of international fashion enthusiasts and designers. It has become an important part of promoting Afghan culture and heritage on a global scale.



### **Mirror Work**

Mirror work, also known as Shisha embroidery, is a decorative technique where small mirrors are incorporated into the fabric using embroidery stitches. This style adds a reflective element to

the design and is commonly seen in Afghan clothing, including shirts and traditional dresses.



### **Phulkari Embroidery**

Although Phulkari embroidery is traditionally associated with the Punjab region, it is also found in parts of Afghanistan. Phulkari involves creating vibrant floral patterns using brightly colored silk threads on a base fabric. This type of embroidery is known for its eye-catching and richly textured designs.



The embroidery styles on Turban shirts can differ based on regional variations, personal preferences, and the expertise of the embroiderers.

### **TRANSFORMING AFGHAN WOMEN IN THE FASHION INDUSTRY OF AFGHANISTAN**

The women's fashion industry in Afghanistan has undergone significant growth and transformation in recent years, reflecting the changing social and cultural dynamics in the country.<sup>106</sup> Afghan women have emerged as

<sup>106</sup> Sayed Qudrat Hashimy, 'Impact of WTO Agreement Accession on Trade and a Few Intellectual Property Rights in Afghanistan' (2021).



prominent figures in the fashion world, both as designers and consumers, embracing their sense of style and self-expression.

Afghanistan's women's fashion scene encompasses a diverse range of styles, blending traditional elements with contemporary influences. Traditional Afghan garments, such as the Afghan dress (Afghanistan's national dress), are still widely worn and cherished.<sup>107</sup> These dresses typically feature vibrant colors, intricate embroidery, and flowing silhouettes, celebrating the cultural heritage of the country.

In addition to traditional attire, Afghan women are also embracing modern fashion trends and incorporating them into their wardrobes. Western-inspired clothing, including jeans, skirts, and blouses, has become more common, especially in urban areas. Afghan designers are creating fusion designs that merge traditional Afghan elements with Western cuts and fabrics, catering to the evolving tastes and preferences of Afghan women.<sup>108</sup>

Fashion shows and exhibitions dedicated to women's fashion have gained popularity, providing platforms for Afghan designers to showcase their collections and promote their brands. These events not only highlight the talent and creativity of Afghan designers but also create networking and business opportunities within the industry.

The rise of social media and e-commerce has played a significant role in promoting Afghan women's fashion globally. Afghan designers and brands can now reach a wider audience, connect with international consumers, and showcase their collections online. This has opened up new avenues for exporting Afghan women's fashion and contributing to the country's economy. There is a growing emphasis on empowering Afghan women through fashion. Many initiatives and

organizations are supporting female entrepreneurs and artisans, providing them with training, resources, and opportunities to showcase their skills and products. This focus on women's empowerment not only fuels the growth of the fashion industry but also promotes gender equality and economic independence for Afghan women.

Despite the progress, the women's fashion industry in Afghanistan still faces challenges, including limited access to resources, infrastructure, and market opportunities. However, Afghan women's determination, resilience, and creativity continue to drive the industry forward. With the support of the government, international organizations, and the global fashion community, the women's fashion industry in Afghanistan is poised for further growth, contributing to the cultural, social, and economic development of the country.

#### ROLE OF WOMEN IN TRADE AND BUSINESS

Despite numerous challenges and cultural barriers, Afghan women's participation in trade business has been steadily increasing. They have demonstrated resilience and entrepreneurship by establishing small businesses in various sectors such as agriculture, handicrafts, textiles, and food production, contributing to the local economy and empowering women economically. However, accessing markets, both domestically and internationally,<sup>109</sup> remains a significant hurdle due to limited infrastructure, transportation constraints, and bureaucratic obstacles. To address this, there is a need to improve transportation networks and streamline trade processes. Additionally, financial inclusion is crucial for women to establish and expand their trade businesses, but they often face difficulties in accessing loans and other financial services due to cultural norms, lack of collateral, and limited

<sup>107</sup> Sayed Qudrat Hashimy, 'Protecting Geographical Indications in Afghanistan' (10 November 2022) <<https://papers.ssrn.com/abstract=4324242>> accessed 2 June 2023.  
<sup>108</sup> Hashimy and Magoge (n 4).

<sup>109</sup> Sayed Qudrat Hashimy, 'China's Belt-Road Initiative and Investment Strategies: A Two Pillar Approach to Afghanistan' (2023) 12 International Journal of Science and Research (IJSR) 449.

financial literacy. Efforts to increase their access to finance and promote financial inclusion can enhance their participation in trade. Skills development and capacity-building programs focusing on business management, marketing, and export-import procedures are vital for improving women's competitiveness in trade. Networking and mentorship programs provide women with valuable connections, resources, guidance, and support from experienced professionals. Promoting gender equality, challenging stereotypes, and addressing cultural and social barriers are essential for fostering an enabling environment for women's participation in trade.<sup>110</sup> International support from organizations, governments, and development agencies through technical assistance, capacity building, market linkages, and financial aid can further empower Afghan women in trade.<sup>111</sup> By addressing challenges and creating opportunities, the engagement of Afghan women in trade can contribute to economic growth, poverty reduction, and gender equality in Afghanistan, leading to sustainable development for the country and its communities.

#### ROLE OF AFGHAN WOMEN IN THE LOCAL ECONOMY

Throughout Afghanistan's history, Afghan women have played a crucial role in the local economy, despite grappling with numerous challenges and barriers. Their participation in economic activities has fluctuated over time, influenced by cultural, social, and political factors. Afghan women have made significant contributions in several key aspects of the local economy.<sup>112</sup>

Firstly, agriculture serves as the backbone of Afghanistan's economy, and women have long been involved in farming and livestock rearing. They actively contribute to crop cultivation, animal husbandry, and food production, particularly in rural areas. Unfortunately, women's agricultural work often remains unrecognized and undervalued, as much of it falls within the informal sector or goes unpaid.

Secondly, Afghan women have displayed remarkable resilience and resourcefulness in entrepreneurship, particularly within the small-scale and informal sectors. They engage in a diverse range of entrepreneurial activities, including handicrafts, tailoring, food processing, and retail trade. Many women operate home-based businesses, generating income to support their families.

Thirdly, Afghan women's participation in the education and healthcare sectors is vital for societal development and well-being. They serve as teachers, healthcare professionals, and caregivers, making significant contributions to the growth of these critical sectors. Women's presence in schools and healthcare facilities plays an essential role in promoting education and improving the health of Afghan communities.

Additionally, there has been a growing emphasis on empowering Afghan women economically through microfinance initiatives and self-help groups. These programs grant women access to credit, financial services, and training to establish or expand their businesses. They enable women to achieve economic self-sufficiency and enhance their role in the local economy.

While the formal sector in Afghanistan has traditionally been male-dominated, progress has been made in increasing women's participation in formal employment. Women now hold positions in government, non-governmental organizations, media, and other sectors. However, their representation in formal employment still lags behind that of men.

<sup>110</sup> Sayed Quadrat Hashimy and others, 'Nurturing Leadership and Capacity Building for Success: Empowering Growth' (2023) 3 33.

<sup>111</sup> 'Nurturing Leadership and Capacity Building for Success: Empowering Growth'

<[https://scholar.google.com/citations?view\\_op=view\\_citation&hl=en&user=\\_XhWcpEAAAAJ&citation\\_for\\_view=\\_XhWcpEAAAAJ:vCSeWdjOjw8C](https://scholar.google.com/citations?view_op=view_citation&hl=en&user=_XhWcpEAAAAJ&citation_for_view=_XhWcpEAAAAJ:vCSeWdjOjw8C)> accessed 2 June 2023.

<sup>112</sup> Sayed Quadrat Hashimy, 'China's Belt-Road Initiative and Investment Strategies: A Two Pillar Approach to Afghanistan' (2023) 12 International Journal of Science and Research (IJSR) 449.

It is important to acknowledge that Afghan women face significant challenges and inequalities when it comes to accessing economic opportunities. Decades of conflict, cultural norms, gender-based discrimination, and limited access to education and resources have hindered their economic empowerment. The Afghan government and various international organizations are actively working to address these barriers and create an enabling environment for women's economic participation and empowerment.

### ROLE OF AFGHAN WOMEN IN THE HEALTH SECTOR

Afghan women have played a crucial role in Afghanistan's health sector, making significant contributions to the well-being and healthcare of the population. Despite facing various challenges and barriers, Afghan women have actively participated in healthcare provision, education, and community outreach.<sup>113</sup> They serve as doctors, nurses, midwives, and other healthcare professionals, delivering essential medical services to their communities. Women healthcare professionals provide culturally sensitive care to female patients and play a vital role in maternal and child health, reducing maternal and infant mortality rates. Afghan women also engage in health education and awareness programs, disseminating information on hygiene, disease prevention, family planning, and nutrition. Their involvement is crucial for reaching out to women and families and promoting positive health behaviors. Additionally, Afghan women contribute to mental health and psychosocial support, addressing the psychological well-being of individuals and communities affected by conflict and trauma.<sup>114</sup> They actively participate in advocacy and policy development, shaping gender-specific health policies, improving healthcare access for women, and promoting gender equality in the

sector. Despite facing challenges such as discrimination, cultural barriers, and limited resources, efforts are being made to create an enabling environment for Afghan women in the health sector.<sup>115</sup> Their active involvement is essential for improving healthcare outcomes, particularly for women and children, and advancing the overall well-being of Afghan communities.

### ROLE OF AFGHAN WOMEN AS A SELF-HELP GROUP

Afghan women have actively participated in self-help groups, playing a significant role in empowering women, fostering economic independence, and creating a supportive network within their communities. These groups provide women with opportunities for economic empowerment through pooling resources, starting businesses, and accessing credit and financial services. Skill development and training programs offered by self-help groups enhance women's abilities in entrepreneurship, financial literacy, and vocational skills, enabling them to expand their income-generating activities and gain independence. In addition to economic benefits, self-help groups provide social support and networking opportunities, allowing women to share experiences, provide emotional support, and collectively address challenges.<sup>116</sup> Afghan women in these groups engage in advocacy and collective action, advocating for women's rights, gender equality, and access to resources. They also actively participate in community development activities, contributing to healthcare campaigns, education initiatives, and environmental conservation. The success of self-help groups relies on factors such as resources, training, policies, and a conducive environment. Efforts are being made by the Afghan government and organizations to support and promote the establishment of self-help groups, recognizing their role in

<sup>113</sup> Sayed Qudrat Hashimy, 'Impact of COVID-19 on the Trade in Afghanistan' (2021) 6 52.

<sup>114</sup> Sayed Qudrat Hashimy, 'The Legal Paradigm of Menstrual Leaves Policy in the United Arab Emirates, Kuwait, and Afghanistan' (2023) 16 Journal of Disease and Global Health 16.

<sup>115</sup> Sayed Qudrat Hashimy, 'Menstrual Leave Dissent and Stigma Labelling: A Comparative Legal Discourse' [2022] International Journal of Law Management & Humanities.

<sup>116</sup> Sayed Qudrat Hashimy, 'Menstrual Leave Dissent and Stigma Labelling: A Comparative Legal Discourse' (14 December 2022) <<https://papers.ssrn.com/abstract=4308596>> accessed 2 June 2023.

empowering women, fostering economic growth, and advancing social change.

#### **ROLE OF AFGHAN WOMEN IN THE EDUCATION SECTOR**

Afghan women have played a vital role in the education sector, contributing to the development and growth of education in Afghanistan. Despite facing significant challenges and barriers, Afghan women have actively participated in various aspects of the education sector. They have served as teachers and educators,<sup>117</sup> expanding access to education for girls and women, particularly in remote and underserved areas. Their leadership as school administrators and managers has ensured the effective management of educational institutions. Afghan women have been actively involved in initiatives to increase access to education, breaking down social and cultural barriers that hindered girls' education.<sup>118</sup> They have made significant contributions to curriculum development and policy making, advocating for gender equality, inclusivity, and quality education for all. Additionally, Afghan women have been engaged in community education and adult literacy programs, empowering women with knowledge and enhancing their self-confidence. Despite challenges such as gender-based discrimination and lack of resources, Afghan women in the education sector have shown resilience and determination. Efforts by the Afghan government, civil society organizations, and international partners continue to support and promote women's participation in education, recognizing its crucial role in the development of Afghan society and the empowerment of women and girls.

#### **ROLE OF AFGHAN WOMEN DURING ARMED CONFLICT AND TRANQUILITY**

Afghan women have played diverse and significant roles both during times of war and in pursuing peace in Afghanistan. Their

contributions and resilience have been instrumental in shaping the social, economic, and political landscape of the country. Here are some key aspects of Afghan women's roles during war and peace:

#### **DURING WAR**

##### ***Civilian Survival and Resilience***

Afghan women have demonstrated extraordinary resilience and determination to protect their families and communities during times of war. They have shown remarkable strength in navigating challenging circumstances, ensuring the survival and well-being of their loved ones.

##### ***Education and Empowerment***

Despite the disruptions caused by war, Afghan women have sought education and knowledge as a means of empowerment. They have fought against the denial of education, established underground schools, and pursued learning opportunities to equip themselves with the skills necessary to rebuild their lives and contribute to society.

##### ***Humanitarian Aid and Assistance***

Afghan women have played crucial roles in providing humanitarian aid and assistance during times of conflict.<sup>119</sup> They have been active in grassroots organizations, delivering healthcare services, distributing food and supplies,<sup>120</sup> and advocating for the needs of vulnerable populations, including women and children.

##### ***Community Mobilization and Resistance***

Afghan women have been actively involved in community mobilization and resistance efforts against oppression and injustice.<sup>121</sup> They have participated in social movements, voiced their

<sup>117</sup> 'The Impact of Social Media on Afghanistan's Tourism Industry: A Roadmap for the Future in the Internet Highway' (n 5).

<sup>118</sup> 'Nurturing Leadership and Capacity Building for Success: Empowering Growth' (n 28).

<sup>119</sup> M Suresh Benjamin and Sayed Qudrat Hashimy, 'The Deployment of U.S. Drones in Afghanistan: Deadly Sky and Unmanned Injustice' [2023] International Journal of Law and Management.

<sup>120</sup> Sayed Qudrat Hashimy, 'Analysis of the United States' Liability for War Crime in Afghanistan' [2021] Available at SSRN 4138859.

<sup>121</sup> Sayed Qudrat Hashimy, Jackson Magoge and Absnat Mokarim, 'Relentless Violation of International Humanitarian Law During the Ongoing Conflict in Afghanistan' (2022) 9 SSRN Electronic Journal 12.

concerns, organized protests, and campaigned for human rights, advocating for a more inclusive and just society.

#### **DURING PEACE**

##### ***Advocacy and Negotiation***

Afghan women have been at the forefront of advocating for peace and participating in peace negotiations. They have actively engaged in dialogue, representing the voices and interests of women and marginalized communities.<sup>122</sup> Their involvement has been crucial in ensuring gender equality and addressing women's rights issues within peace processes.

##### ***Rebuilding and Reconstruction***

Afghan women have actively participated in the rebuilding and reconstruction efforts following periods of war. They have been involved in various sectors, including education, healthcare, governance, and community development, working to restore infrastructure, improve livelihoods, and enhance social services.

##### ***Political Participation***

Afghan women have increased their participation in politics and decision-making processes, both at the local and national levels. They have run for office, served in government positions, and advocated for policies that promote gender equality, women's rights, and social justice.

##### ***Social and Cultural Transformation***

Afghan women have been agents of social and cultural transformation, challenging gender norms and advocating for more inclusive and equitable societies. They have played key roles in promoting women's rights, raising awareness about gender-based violence, and empowering

women to actively participate in all spheres of life.<sup>123</sup>

It is important to note that Afghan women have faced significant challenges and risks in asserting their roles during war and peace, including gender-based violence, discrimination, and security threats. However, their resilience, determination, and collective efforts have contributed to shaping the trajectory of Afghanistan's future, fostering peace, and advocating for a more inclusive and just society.

#### **UNVEILING THE MULTITUDE OF HEALTH CHALLENGES FACED BY AFGHAN WOMEN**

Afghan women face a multitude of health challenges influenced by cultural norms, limited healthcare access, ongoing conflict, and gender inequality. Maternal and child health is a major concern as Afghanistan has one of the highest maternal and child mortality rates globally. Lack of access to skilled healthcare providers during pregnancy and childbirth,<sup>124</sup> along with insufficient nutrition and healthcare services, contribute to preventable deaths. Reproductive health issues also persist, including early marriages, limited access to contraception and family planning, and inadequate knowledge in this area. These factors lead to high fertility rates, closely spaced pregnancies, and a lack of control over reproductive choices. Gender-based violence, encompassing domestic violence, sexual assault, and forced marriages, continues to have severe physical and psychological consequences for Afghan women, negatively impacting their overall health and well-being.<sup>125</sup>

Limited access to healthcare services, especially in rural areas, poses another challenge. Women often face difficulties

<sup>123</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>124</sup> Sayed Qudrat Hashimy, 'The Agonising Narrative of Environmental Dilapidation in the Tussle of Armed Conflict; From the Lens of International Humanitarian Laws' (2023) 17 *Journal of Global Ecology and Environment* 45.

<sup>125</sup> Hashimy, 'Mapping the Paradigm of Disabilities in Afghanistan from the Lens of Law and Policy' (n 3).

<sup>122</sup> Hashimy, 'The Doctrine of Copyright Exhaustion In Software Under Indian Copyright Act' (n 12).

reaching healthcare facilities due to long distances, transportation issues, and cultural barriers.<sup>126</sup> Consequently, they struggle to receive essential healthcare services, leading to delayed diagnoses and treatment. Mental health problems are also prevalent among Afghan women due to prolonged conflict, displacement, and the loss of family members. The stigma surrounding mental health and limited mental health services exacerbate the issue, with many women experiencing trauma-related disorders such as PTSD and depression.<sup>127</sup>

Infectious diseases disproportionately affect Afghan women, including tuberculosis, hepatitis, malaria, and HIV/AIDS. Factors such as limited healthcare access, lack of awareness, and cultural barriers hinder preventive measures and timely diagnosis and treatment. Moreover, malnutrition poses a significant health challenge for Afghan women and children. Inadequate access to nutritious food, especially during times of conflict and displacement, contributes to high rates of undernutrition and micronutrient deficiencies.

Addressing these health challenges necessitates a comprehensive approach that focuses on improving healthcare infrastructure, ensuring access to quality healthcare services, promoting education and awareness regarding reproductive and sexual health, addressing gender inequality and violence against women, and investing in mental health services and psychosocial support programs. By tackling these issues, Afghan women can lead healthier lives and contribute to the development and well-being of their communities.

Menstruation is a biological process but it is also a tabo faux.<sup>128</sup> In Afghanistan, menstruation is surrounded by cultural taboos and stigmas,

leading to limited discussions and knowledge about menstrual health and hygiene.<sup>129</sup> This lack of awareness can result in reproductive health issues and restrict women's participation in daily activities.<sup>130</sup> Addressing the menstrual taboo requires open discussions, accurate information, improved access to hygiene products, and creating supportive environments. Education plays a crucial role in challenging cultural norms and empowering women and girls to manage their menstrual health confidently.<sup>131</sup>

Menstrual leave is a policy that allows women to take time off during their menstrual cycle due to severe pain or discomfort.<sup>132</sup> In Afghanistan, cultural norms and attitudes towards menstruation vary, and the provision of menstrual leave may not be widely practiced.<sup>133</sup> Access to menstrual hygiene products and education on menstrual health remain significant challenges, particularly in rural areas.<sup>134</sup> While menstrual leave policies could provide relief, it's crucial to consider cultural context, workplace dynamics, and the impact on gender equality. Any discussion on menstrual leave in Afghanistan would require careful consideration of these factors and a broader conversation on menstrual health and gender equity.<sup>135</sup>

### WOMEN WITH DISABILITIES IN AFGHANISTAN

Women with disabilities in Afghanistan confront a multitude of challenges as a result of the intersection of gender inequality and disability discrimination.<sup>136</sup> They face social stigma and marginalization, often being subjected to

<sup>126</sup> Hashimy, 'The Legal Paradigm of Menstrual Leaves Policy in the United Arab Emirates, Kuwait, and Afghanistan' (n 31).

<sup>127</sup> Sandra Fredman, 'The Right to Health' in Sandra Fredman (ed), *Comparative Human Rights Law* (Oxford University Press 2018) <<https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780199689408.003.0008>> accessed 19 May 2023.

<sup>128</sup> Hashimy, 'The Legal Paradigm of Menstrual Leaves Policy in the United Arab Emirates, Kuwait, and Afghanistan' (n 31).

<sup>129</sup> 'Exploring Menstrual Leave in Islamic Jurisprudence: Cultural and Religious Perspectives'

<[https://scholar.google.com/citations?view\\_op=view\\_citation&hl=en&user=\\_XhWcpEAAAAJ&scstart=20&pagesize=80&citation\\_for\\_view=\\_XhWcpEAAAAJ:ujjXPdh5xs4C](https://scholar.google.com/citations?view_op=view_citation&hl=en&user=_XhWcpEAAAAJ&scstart=20&pagesize=80&citation_for_view=_XhWcpEAAAAJ:ujjXPdh5xs4C)> accessed 2 June 2023.

<sup>130</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>131</sup> Hashimy, 'Menstrual Leave Dissent and Stigma Labelling' (n 33).

<sup>132</sup> Hashimy, 'Menstrual Leave Dissent and Stigma Labelling' (n 32).

<sup>133</sup> Hashimy, 'Menstrual Leave Dissent and Stigma Labelling' (n 33).

<sup>134</sup> Hashimy, 'Menstrual Leave Dissent and Stigma Labelling' (n 32).

<sup>135</sup> Hashimy, 'Menstrual Leave Dissent and Stigma Labelling' (n 33).

<sup>136</sup> Sayed Qudrat Hashimy, *Survivors and Disability of Armed Conflicts: The Conundrum of Differently Abled Persons in Afghanistan* (2023).

exclusion and negative attitudes due to cultural norms and traditional beliefs.<sup>137</sup> Accessing quality education is a significant hurdle, as the physical infrastructure of schools is frequently inaccessible, limiting their ability to attend classes. Societal attitudes towards disability further hamper inclusive education and specialized resources for these women.<sup>138</sup> Healthcare disparities are also prevalent, with physical barriers in healthcare facilities and a lack of specialized providers impeding their access to adequate healthcare services. Women with disabilities are at a higher risk of experiencing gender-based violence and discrimination, facing abuse, neglect, and exclusion from social protection mechanisms. Economic empowerment is hindered by discrimination, limited job opportunities, and workplace accommodations.<sup>139</sup> Moreover, the limited accessibility of physical infrastructure, transportation systems, and public spaces prevents full participation in society. Addressing these challenges requires a comprehensive approach that includes raising awareness about disability rights and inclusion, promoting accessible education and healthcare, combating gender-based violence and discrimination, fostering economic opportunities, and improving overall accessibility.<sup>140</sup> By recognizing and addressing the unique needs and experiences of women with disabilities, Afghanistan can work towards creating a more inclusive and equitable society for all.<sup>141</sup>

### CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the role of Afghan women in economic development is crucial for the overall growth and prosperity of Afghanistan. Despite numerous challenges, Afghan women have

made significant strides in various sectors, including education, healthcare, government, media, and entrepreneurship. Their increased workforce participation strengthens the economy and empowers women, leading to improved livelihoods and reduced poverty. The entrepreneurship and small businesses led by Afghan women contribute to the growth of the informal sector, generating income, creating jobs, and fostering economic stability. Access to education equips women with the knowledge and skills necessary for economic participation and leadership roles. Efforts in promoting financial inclusion aim to provide women with access to banking, credit, and savings, empowering them economically. In rural areas, Afghan women play a vital role in agriculture and rural development, contributing to food security and economic growth. Their involvement in policy and advocacy is instrumental in promoting gender equality, economic empowerment, and improved access to resources. Moreover, Afghan women serve as role models and mentors, inspiring and guiding younger generations to pursue economic opportunities and challenge societal norms. However, challenges such as cultural barriers, gender-based violence, limited resources, and security concerns persist. Achieving gender equality and empowering women economically requires sustained efforts from the government, civil society organizations, and international partners. By addressing these challenges and creating an enabling environment, Afghan women can continue to drive transformative economic development. It is essential to recognize the immense potential and contributions of Afghan women in economic development and provide them with the necessary support and resources to overcome barriers. Empowering Afghan women economically not only benefits them individually but also contributes to the overall advancement and prosperity of Afghan society as a whole. By harnessing the talents and capabilities of Afghan women, the nation can achieve sustainable and inclusive economic

<sup>137</sup> Hashimy, 'Mapping the Paradigm of Disabilities in Afghanistan from the Lens of Law and Policy' (n 3).

<sup>138</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>139</sup> 'Exploring Menstrual Leave in Islamic Jurisprudence: Cultural and Religious Perspectives' (n 46).

<sup>140</sup> Sayed Quadrat Hashimy, 'Survivors and Disability of Armed Conflicts: The Conundrum of Differently Abled Persons in Afghanistan' (6 April 2023) <<https://papers.ssrn.com/abstract=4411536>> accessed 2 June 2023.

<sup>141</sup> 'Exploring Menstrual Leave in Islamic Jurisprudence: Cultural and Religious Perspectives' (n 46).

growth, fostering a brighter future for all its citizens.

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