



Breaking Barriers: The Struggle and Contributions of Afghan Women to Sustainability

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Abstract: In spite of structural obstacles, how do women in Afghanistan contribute to the Sustainable Development Goals and what part do they play in advancing progress? **Objectives:** This study looked at the difficulties faced by Afghan women and how they contribute to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, which include hunger, poverty, economic growth, renewable energy, education, and peace. **Approach:** Previous studies have highlighted the significant barriers Afghan women face in accessing education, employment, financial resources, and decision-making opportunities. Google Scholar and Scopus were two of the online repositories from which the literature was obtained. The study employed a qualitative approach, and the data was analyzed using content analysis. **Results:** It was discovered that women face gender-based abuse, lack financial resources, are denied access to educational opportunities, are prohibited from registering enterprises, and are prohibited from working. It was also established that women in Afghanistan participate in areas, such as peacekeeping and security, creating employment, and are involved in the renewable energy sector, food production and food security, and reducing gender-based violence. **Implications:** The findings imply that excluding women from education, employment, entrepreneurship, and decision-making undermines Afghanistan's progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals **Value:** Regarding policy recommendations, it is suggested that social security programmes, improved governance, and educational support are essential for supporting women and girls in Afghanistan.

Keywords: Economic development; poverty; religion; sustainable development goals; women

JEL Classification: D63; J16; O15; O17; Q56

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1. Introduction

Afghanistan has a population of 40 million people (World Bank, 2023a) of which 49.5% are women. The country's religious tendency is predominantly Islamic, but others on a lesser scale are Christianity and Hinduism (Lombard, 2022). The supreme legislation of Afghanistan states that 99.7% of the country's citizens practice Islam (United States Commission on International Religious Freedom, 2022). The country was affected by a war that spanned 20 years from 2001-2021 (Witte 2024) and caused more than 4 million people to be internally displaced (Amnesty International, 2020). The war created many macro- and micro-economic challenges, such as high poverty levels, poor infrastructure, low levels of economic growth, political instability, and internal and external displacement (Galdo, Lopez-Acevedo, & Rama, 2020).

The article draws attention to the widespread violation of women's and girls' human rights, especially after the establishment of the second Taliban regime in Afghanistan, which began in August 2021 (Maizland, 2023). The majority of these violations are interconnected; a government's capacity to achieve other Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) will be hampered if it significantly fails to satisfy one SDG. The author's premise is that Afghan women face "challenges" in contributing to Afghanistan's achievement of the SDGs, partly because of the harsh and discriminatory conditions imposed by the current government on peace, justice and strong institutions (SDG 16). The recommendation is to repeal these policies so that women can contribute to the country's social, economic, political, and cultural development (Haqpana & Tsouroufli, 2023; United Nations, 2024a). The research questions are:

1. What do women contribute to attaining Afghanistan's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)?
2. What challenges hinder women's active participation in achieving the SDGs in Afghanistan?
3. How can these challenges be addressed to enhance women's contributions to the SDGs in Afghanistan?

Abbasy (2024) found how gender inequality in Afghanistan has severely harmed economic resilience and how to overcome this situation. In order to guarantee rapid economic growth, gender equality must be pursued. The obstacles that prevent Afghan women from actively contributing to the SDGs are not mentioned in the

study. Dalaman (2024) examined undocumented Afghan women's experiences in Istanbul's Zeytinburnu by using the United Nations (UN) Sustainable Development Goal's framework. The key challenges that Afghan women face are social exclusion, limited access to education and patriarchal norms enforced by society (Dalaman, 2024). Dalaman's (2024) research focused only on Afghan women in Istanbul and excluded the challenges faced by others in the country, resulting in a research gap. Karmania, Weiss, & Nazari (2023) investigated ways to help Afghan women pursue higher education in spite of the Taliban regime's many obstacles. The study examined the various obstacles that prevent women from pursuing higher education. Karmania, Weiss, & Nazari's (2023) research is limited by its emphasis on SDG 1 (education). How women may help Afghanistan achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) is unknown. To overcome the many barriers, it is necessary to examine the difficulties these women encounter and potential solutions. The current study is innovative because it examines the connections between important concerns, such as women's involvement in SDGs, the difficulties they encounter, and the necessary solutions. The six (6) SDGs poverty (1), economic growth (8), renewable energy (7), education (4), peace (16), and hunger (2) are particularly included in the report.

In order to reduce gender inequality and accomplish the numerous SDGs mentioned above in a non-deterministic way, policy must be influenced by this research. Additionally, the study advances the achievement of specific sustainable development goals and contributes to the body of material already available on gender-related topics. On a global scale, some economies with a high female labour force have benefited because of reduced poverty and increased sustainable economic growth, just to mention these two (Gebre, 2023).

From a global perspective, a high participation of females in the labour force is essential for attaining high economic growth (Pimkina & de la Flor, 2020). China is an example of a country with a high participation rate (60,54%) of female labour and the economy has channelled the skills of women and men into the production sector to achieve a highly industrialised economy with low levels of poverty (Textor, 2024; World Bank, 2023b). Afghanistan can therefore use the experiences of other economies, like China, to rebuild its economy if their economies have benefited from women's abilities that have helped achieve some SDGs.

According to the World Bank in 2019, Afghanistan had 22% female labour but dropped to 16% in 2020 (World Bank, 2023c). This decline suggests that a large

number of women are not engaged in the workforce. In 2017, in Afghanistan's manufacturing sector, a total of 64.4% were women; 33% were in agriculture; 9.6% were in the community and social service sector; 1.8% were in the wholesale and retail sector, and 0.1% were in the construction sector (Junussova et al., 2019). These figures imply that Afghan women are still underrepresented in the workforce. Therefore, there is a need for lasting solutions to address these labour market anomalies, such as women's productivity to increase economic growth (SDG 8).

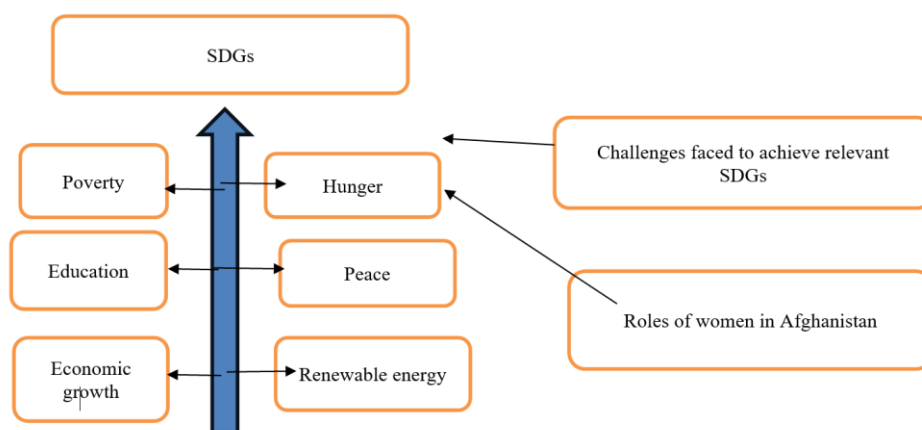
For women's empowerment, Afghanistan targeted 35% of learning institutions' intake to be women (World Trade Organization, 2005). Despite such targets, the nation had a low female literacy rate of 21% at the end of 2021 (World Bank, 2023e). From an educational standpoint, more work needs to be done to empower Afghan women. This is essential to attain the Sustainable Development Goal 4, access to education (United Nations, 2024b).

The structure of this study is as follows: A theoretical and empirical literature assessment, specifically the liberal feminist theory and the human capital theory, serves as the foundation for Sections 2.1 and 2.2. Sections 3, 4, 5, and 6 cover the research methodology, findings and discussion, policy recommendations, and conclusion, respectively.

2. Theoretical Literature Review

A review of theoretical literature is presented in this section. The theoretical framework is first presented, and then the study issue is explained using liberal feminism and human capital ideas.

Figure 1. Theoretical Framework



Source: Researcher's construct (2026)

The six SDGs considered in the study are shown in Figure 1, with an emphasis on the role of women in achieving these. The difficulties Afghan women encounter in accomplishing some of these SDGs are also discussed.

2.1. Human Capital Theory

According to the human capital theory (Blundell et al., 1999; Khaykin, Lapniskas, & Korchegina, 2020; Wuttaphan, 2017), investing in education is vital to gaining knowledge and experience, which ultimately improves personal wealth. These abilities boost one's efficiency at work according to Tan (2014). Noted by Robinson & Pope (2023), productivity determines a person's wage in the perfect labour market, therefore, this enhanced productivity may result in a higher salary for the individual.

This theory hinges on access to education (Noel & Finocchio, 2022); to be effective in addressing global challenges, such as poverty, education is important. According to this study, women without formal education might not be completely equipped to contribute to the achievement of the SDGs. For instance, it could be challenging to get employment with a respectable income without significant education, such as a degree or diploma. One might not be able to participate in economic activities that impact future levels of economic growth if they are unemployed.

Control over resources and positions that allow them to solve important issues impacting the global community must be granted to those who have attained a specific level of education. In Afghanistan, females with a low literacy rate are not considered for educational opportunities; as a result, there are no job opportunities in the private and public sectors where they could make an impact and contribute to policy issues relating to the SDGs (Lyons, 2023; Mashwani, 2017). Afghanistan must make sure that women have access to work and education opportunities in order to fulfill its commitment to attaining the SDGs. Afghanistan's commitment to achieving the SDGs by 2030 is but a pledge, and the nation may take longer to reach its objective if they are denied these chances.

2.2. Liberal Feminism Theory

According to liberal feminism, women's disadvantaged position in society is a result of their lack of equal access to opportunities and separated from men (Enyew & Alemeneh, 2018; Wolf, 2007). One of the main tenets of feminist philosophy is the elimination of gender inequalities. As a result, the notion promotes equal opportunity for men and women. This theory centres on SDG 5 on gender equality (Kim, 2017).

The liberal feminist theory is also based on the notion that because all members of society are equal, everyone must have the same rights (Wolf, 2007). This theory is crucial to this study because Bailey (2016), Mohajan (2022) & Shayan (2015) found that Afghanistan has taken steps to address gender inequality, however, if the educationally empowered women in Afghanistan are not given the platform for nation-building, gender inequality may continue to be high.

2.3. Empirical Literature Review

The empirical literature review that focuses on the analysis of recent academic works on the sub-themes associated with Afghanistan is presented in this section. These sub-themes include poverty dynamics, perspectives on women's empowerment, women and governance issues, access to education, gender inequality, and women's involvement in the energy sector, innovation, and climate change.

2.3.1. Poverty Dynamics in Afghanistan

Poverty is multidimensional and encompasses key issues, such as access to health, education, water and sanitation, a good living standard, peace, and access to

nutritious food (Agboola & Balcilar, 2012, 1; Alkire et al., 2023). For the Afghan people, access to any of these elements has been difficult. Afghanistan's rapidly changing political, social, and security contexts have both direct and indirect effects on population nutrition, especially for women and children (Akseer et al., 2018). Therefore, attaining the SDGs is adversely affected by the effects of war on the economy.

For the past 20 years, this oil-rich country has struggled with poor leadership and political instability (Thier & Worden, 2017). Due to the civil war, which affected the economy of Afghanistan, more than 1.2 million Afghans were internally displaced in 2016 and lived in abject poverty (Noorzoy, 2017). The cost of the war in Afghanistan is estimated at US\$3 billion (Barret, 2018). This suggests that in order to reconstruct the country, the Afghan government needs to do more. Thus, attaining the SDGs is adversely affected by the effects of war on the economy.

Poverty is a problem in Afghanistan, which scored 0.51 on the United Nations Development Programme's (UNDP) 2021 Human Development Index (HDI), placing it 119th out of 195 nations. However, the country dropped to 180th place in the world in 2022 with an HDI index of 0.47 (UNDP, 2023). This implies that the country is performing poorly in terms of gross income per capita, healthcare, education, and life expectancy. In other words, a significant portion of Afghanistan's population lives in poverty. The low HDI levels, which suggest a high rate of poverty, provide justification for this (Amaluddin et al., 2018). Additionally, these numbers demonstrate that the economy is becoming poorer due to the HDI's declining value, which is used as a proxy for poverty.

2.3.2. Perspectives of Empowerment of Afghan Women

Williamson (2019) researched the role of Afghan women in nation-building. According to research findings, major efforts have been undertaken to increase the number of women in the Afghan National Police (ANP) and to raise the general standard of human rights education for all the police officers (Williamson, 2019). Furthermore, it was discovered that in just four years (2005–2008), the ANP family grew from one to twenty-four. This suggests that there are now more police officers. In addition, certain police officers received small-group instruction in computer skills, literacy, and report writing, as well as emergency midwifery training.

The country is addressing gender disparity as more women participate in SDG 5 (Gender equality) decision-making, according to these research findings. In addition,

human rights, education and the inclusion of women in the police force help to ensure peace and stability (SDG 16). Furthermore, it was realised that cases of violence on women continue to be reported and that some government officials in Afghanistan are reluctant to solve them (Williamson, 2019). This violence is caused by political issues or the war that has been affecting the economy (Shawki, 2011).

The employment of women is essential to reducing poverty, particularly in the unorganized sector. Junussova et al., (2021) support this comment and mention that women deserve equal opportunities with access to resources to participate in different economic activities, such as entrepreneurship. As women's businesses flourish, they can employ more people allowing them to support their families and earn a living (Hunter, Patel, & Sugiyajama, 2020). However, this is dependent on the success of their business. Junussova et al., (2019) support the above sentiments and established that women own just 3% of the companies listed by the Afghanistan Investment Support Agency (AISA) (World Bank, 2024d). 98% of businesswomen live in cities, and 80% have completed college or higher education. These study results are consistent with those of Najib & Maclachlan (2023), who contend that a lack of peace and calm impacted women's and girls' access to educational services and caused internal and external displacement. Thus, women's access to educational services in Afghanistan was hampered by the war and certain of the Taliban's policies.

It was further established that of these women, 78% own and operate microbusinesses with one to ten employees (Junussova et al., 2019). These study results show that women who are entrepreneurs make a living and hire other people. This helps with poverty reduction and contributes to the economic growth of Afghanistan; SDGs 1 and 8, respectively (United Nations, 2024a).

However, in order for the state to collect taxes from women-owned enterprises and use those funds to rebuild the economy following the recent conclusion of the conflict, these businesses must be formally registered. In addition to tax income, the company will gain by having access to credit lines, which will enable them to compete both domestically and internationally. It is crucial to remember that the government must support various programs that promote women's empowerment. According to Junussova et al., (2021), Afghanistan's poor implementation of women-centered policies hinders their ability to succeed in business and other areas of life.

2.3.3. Women and Governance Issues in Afghanistan

Afghanistan, now under the control of the Taliban, implemented a ban in December 2022 on Afghan women working in non-government organisations (NGO); a total of 6165 women were affected (United Nations, 2023). Women were compelled to live in poverty as a result of losing their jobs. Such moves by the Taliban government reduced any gains achieved in reducing poverty (SDG 1). Contrary to the 2008 Afghanistan National Development Strategy, the gender gap widened as more women were compelled to leave the workforce.

Women's access to leadership roles and meaningful engagement must be aggressively promoted by the government and the global community. Ghafoori (2020) agrees with the above statement that focused on the role of women in peacebuilding in Afghanistan. According to Ghafoori (2020), women must participate in efforts to maintain peace in Afghanistan. Women's participation in peace efforts and conflict resolution, particularly in cases involving family violence, violence against women, and other family issues, was a key tactic used by women in Afghanistan (Ghafoori, 2020). Establishing non-governmental local councils for peace, having direct conversations with anti-government individuals, and spreading awareness of peace were all important tactics.

To encourage women's engagement in national peace efforts, women's rights activists and civil society organisations held a variety of workshops, conferences, and advocacy programmes (Ghafoori, 2020). These programs contributed to the advancement of peace in Afghanistan. The study did find that there were still obstacles that prevent women from participating in peace efforts. The main obstacles to women's political participation was the widespread gender-based violence against them, the ideological and cultural norms that actively exclude them from political and social roles, the male-established and male-dominated political and social structures that limit them to symbolic roles, the insecurity that negatively affects women's freedom of movement, and more conventional obstacles like low literacy rates and poverty (Ghafoori, 2020). If these obstacles are addressed, Afghanistan has a good chance of achieving the required level of peace and justice.

2.3.4. Educational Access and Gender Inequality in Afghanistan

Access to education is a human right for every person but it is sad to note that this has not been the case, especially for women in Afghanistan (Ohlig & Timm, 2024). This is supported by Ghulami & Naqawi (2022) who indicated that under Taliban

rule from 1996 to 2001, female students were denied access to education opportunities. Ghulami & Naqawi (2022) revealed that although the Afghanistan government improved its financial resources dedicated to educational support, women continued to suffer challenges, such as a lack of qualified teachers and family support, early marriages, and poverty. These research findings indicate that the government needs to address these challenges so that women and girls can access educational opportunities and the economy can support a quality educational service (SDG 4).

Gender equality is one of the SDG goals, and in Afghanistan it has been noted that women do not have equal opportunities compared to men (Lindvall, 2023; Taylor 2020). The country ranked 154 out of 159 on the gender inequality index in 2015 (UNDP, 2017), indicating that the country is not performing well in addressing gender inequality. With initiatives, such as the National Solidarity Program, the nation has made significant strides over the past ten years in creating a comprehensive framework to end gender inequality and social exclusion but problems with policy implementation regarding human rights, gender equality, and equity in healthcare still exist (Angelou & Ray, 2019). Ahmadi & Sultan (2023) reasoned that under Taliban rule, women were banned from enrolling in journalism and engineering courses, making gender inequality high in the educational sector. Apart from that, it lowers the literacy rates with the possibility that the nation may take longer than 2030 to achieve educational access (SDG 4).

2.3.5. Women's Participation in the Energy Sector

Afghanistan has the lowest rate of electricity or energy usage; people primarily depend on charcoal, gas, paraffin, and wood (Fahim & Upham, 2017). The renewable energy sector (SDG7) in Afghanistan is dominated by men with only 3.1% active women (World Bank, 2023d) contributing their skills and knowledge. As a result, more work needs to be done to make it easier for women to participate in the renewable energy industry. This will enhance the economy's ability to access renewable energy for usage in both the industrial and non-industrial sectors.

Similarly, in order to support various businesses and enhance the wellbeing of the Afghan populace, access to a consistent energy supply is essential. According to Polansky & Laldjebaev (2021), households in grid-supplied villages in Afghanistan experience greater immunisation rates, better access to antenatal care, and reduced incidences of disease. But they also have a greater risk of respiratory conditions because they cook indoors. A healthy populace is one of the many advantages that

the economy will experience when it prioritizes universal access to energy. Furthermore, the results of this study show that the SDGs are interrelated. For instance, access to health care (SDG 3) is made possible by the provision of renewable energy (SDG 7) (United Nations, 2023).

2.3.6. Innovation and Climate Change

Addressing food security and combating hunger requires innovation in the agricultural sector. According to Tsegaye, Drucza, & Subhatu (2018), Afghanistan's agricultural output has improved thanks to technological innovation. However, research found that women ranked financial difficulties and or poverty as the main obstacle to innovation, followed by a lack of knowledge, distrust, and insecurity (Tsegaye, Drucza & Subhatu, 2018). Therefore, using technology is crucial to increasing agricultural productivity. To ensure that the economy achieves food security and eradicates hunger, it is necessary to overcome the obstacles that women have when utilizing modern technologies in many industries.

Every economy must implement climate-friendly policies and efforts since climate change is a global issue. According to Masood et al., (2022), Afghanistan has recently taken action to combat climate change by developing water systems in remote areas, greenhouses for female farmers, early warning systems for natural disasters, and funding programmes for growing premium eco-friendly crops, such as saffron, together with spreading knowledge and educating communities about climate change. These programs may help address climate-related issues that impact the people of Afghanistan.

3. Methodology

The design of the study was qualitative. The databases and keywords in Table 1 below indicate where the data came from electronic repositories:

Table 1. Databases and keywords

Database	Keywords
Science Direct Scopus Web of Science Google Scholar	Sustainable development goals, women, Afghanistan, education, gender equality, poverty, health, economic development, religion, <i>economic growth</i> , <i>renewable energy</i> , <i>peace</i> , and <i>hunger</i> .

Source: Researcher's construct (2026)

Secondary sources were gathered using Science Direct, Google Scholar, Web of Science, and Scopus (Table 1). The chosen SDGs poverty, hunger, education, peace, economic growth, and renewable energy were the main focus of the study.

Table 2 below shows the inclusion and exclusion criteria used in the selection of research articles from the online repositories.

Table 2. Inclusion and exclusion criteria

Criteria	Eligibility	Exclusion
Type of literature	Editorials, journals, conference papers	Book chapters, commentaries
Language	English	If not reported in English
Publication dates of research articles	Articles published between 2012-2024	Articles published before 2012
Country	Afghanistan	All other countries except Afghanistan
Title and abstract	Articles which focused on the challenges faced by Afghan women about the Sustainable Development Goals	Articles that did not focus on the challenges faced by Afghan women about the Sustainable Development Goals
Full screening of research articles	Includes information on roles played by women in the attainment of SDG goals, challenges faced by Afghan women concerning the Sustainable Development Goals	If the research articles excluded information on roles played by women in the attainment of SDG goals, challenges faced by Afghan women concerning the Sustainable Development Goals

Source: Researcher's construct (2026)

The analysis comprised editorials, journals, and conference papers published in English between 2012 and 2024, as shown in Table 2. In order to accurately depict Afghanistan both during and after the conflict, this was crucial. The study used articles that were more than five years old because they included classic material. The articles that were solely on Afghanistan were chosen based on the abstract and title criteria, as were those that addressed the difficulties Afghan women faced in relation to the Sustainable Development Goals. The articles' complete vetting contained details on Afghan women's contributions to achieving the SDGs as well as the difficulties they encountered.

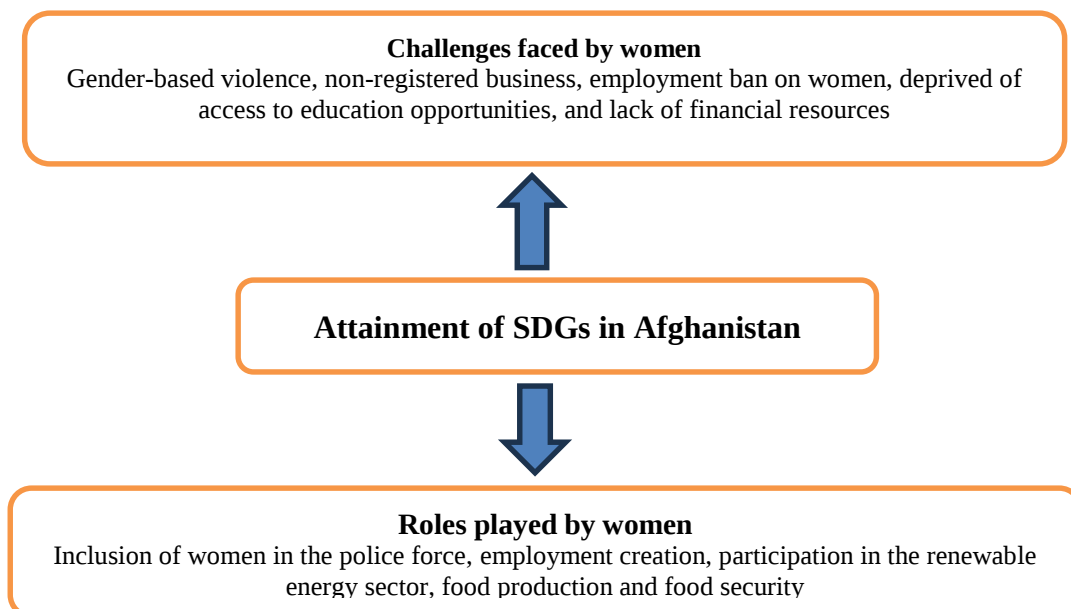
Eighty papers were obtained from several sources in order to comply with Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA). Of these,

50 articles remained for analysis after 12 duplicates were removed, 68 papers were assessed to make sure they satisfied the necessary inclusion criteria, and 18 publications were removed after screening. The data analysis in this research article was done using documentary analysis.

4. Results and Discussion

The research findings are presented in this section. The analysis revealed that women in Afghanistan confront a number of obstacles and are crucial to achieving the chosen SDGs. Figure 2 below shows these findings.

Figure 2. Challenges of Afghan women in the attainment of SDGs



Source: Researcher's construct (2026)

These findings are discussed below:

4. Challenges of Afghan Women in the Attainment of the SDGs

Concerning gender-based violence, it was established that some women are exposed to violence which affects their emotional wellbeing (Ma et al., 2023; United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan, 2023). As a result, the rise in domestic violence

incidents among some Afghan women suggests that there is no harmony within the home. Yes, the United States withdrew its troops from Afghanistan, but both men and women should enjoy domestic and national tranquility.

Therefore, it is argued that if gender-based violence against Afghan women is not addressed, SDG 16 on peace and justice may not be attained. Because they are now victims, this also restricts women's ability to have an impact on peace and justice concerns. These study results are consistent with those of the World Health Organization (2015) and the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (2023), which reported that 52% of Afghan women had experienced physical violence, 17% had experienced sexual violence, and nearly 90% had experienced domestic violence. These alarming figures suggest that gender-based violence needs to be addressed.

This research found that some women in Afghanistan are running non-registered businesses (Junussova et al., 2019). These businesses are, therefore, limited in their operations and affect the local and international markets. The inability of women to formalise their businesses due to the prevailing environment implies that little is contributed to the economy and the creation of fulltime employment (SDG 8). The aforementioned research findings are supported by the Afghanistan Investment Support Agency (2018) & Sahib, Nasri, & Shams (2018), who also note that some women-owned enterprises are not registered and are not profitable.

Furthermore, research findings indicated that the harsh Taliban rules have banned women from being employed (Ghulami & Naqawi 2022; Jan et al. 2022); this is a challenge for them and the entire economy. Even the extended family, who frequently rely on the employed, is impacted by the loss of employment since it results in a loss of income. Afghanistan's ability to achieve the SDGs (no poverty), 2 (zero hunger), and 8 (decent job and economic growth) is severely hampered by the strict regulations. The government did not provide these women with other jobs, demonstrating the extent of women's oppression. The Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights' opinions are supported by these study findings (2023). Vale, Margolin, & Akbari (2023) suggested that Taliban-rule suppresses women's rights, resulting in the need to address the governance issues affecting the economy.

In the study, it was established that some women and girls in Afghanistan are deprived of access to education opportunities (Utsumi, 2022). Access to education is a fundamental human right (SDG 4). Women who do not have access to education

are unable to take advantage of employment opportunities and effectively influence legislation. Furthermore, as men continue to have access to educational possibilities, women's lack of access to education contributes to further gender inequality. These research findings are similar to those of the International Labor Organization (2023) & Inayatullah (2022), which propose that the restrictions on women's and girls' access to education limits their future participation in the labour market.

Another challenge affecting women's ability to be valuable in the agricultural sector, and the craft and textile sectors is the lack of finance to harness technological innovation (Tsegaye et al., 2018). Mass manufacturing and industrial efficiency are made possible by technology, but Afghan women will continue to operate on a small scale if they cannot afford to purchase contemporary machinery. Additionally, this restricts the expansion of industries run by women, which has a negative impact on the encouragement of entrepreneurship. The results of this study corroborate those of Ali & Rajabi (2017) and Ahmed, Tasmin, & Ibrahim (2022), who discovered that the craft business relies heavily on technology to produce goods and even use digital platforms for marketing.

4.1. Role of Afghan Women to Achieve the SDGs

Despite the obstacles Afghan women confront, it has been determined that they are essential to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. The following is a discussion of these roles:

It was established that women play key roles in attaining the SDGs through the inclusion of women in the police force, employment creation, participation in the renewable energy sector, food production, and food security (Williamson, 2019). Research findings by Williamson (2019) indicated that women in the police force help to achieve gender equality and peace in Afghanistan. The study also revealed that women in law enforcement were capable of addressing some of the issues related to gender-based violence that women encounter.

However, their impact is negligible due to the low number of women hired into the police force. Therefore, hiring more women will improve the likelihood of achieving peace and justice (SDG 16), which will benefit the economy. Additionally, as women assume important positions in governmental matters, this will help to ensure that the gender inequity gap is reduced. This study established women's involvement in peace initiatives as a crucial function. Women's rights activists and civil society

organisations held a variety of workshops, conferences, and advocacy programmes in a bid to ensure that peace and justice prevail in the nation (Ghafoori, 2020).

Research findings described how women's informal employment helps create recognised employment, which ultimately aids in reducing poverty and hunger (United Nations Development Programme, 2022). Many individuals are employed by female-led informal companies and other entrepreneurial ventures, which helps to reduce poverty by giving them the money they need to survive. Thus, women contribute to the reduction of hunger, poverty, and unemployment. SDGs 1 and 2 seek to reduce poverty and address hunger, respectively. These results show that women are crucial to Afghanistan's achievement of the SDGs.

Furthermore, the study findings proved that women play a vital role, especially when participating in the renewable energy sector (World Bank, 2023c) by influencing policies on energy usage. However, the number of women in the energy sector is very small, requiring more to be done to ensure that additional women are included. This will help achieve SDG 7.

In the current research, it was established that women were active in food production and the agricultural sector, assisting to achieve food security (Tsegaye et al., 2018). However, the country still faces food shortages, together with the need for women to be fully empowered to be effective in the agricultural sector and produce increased outputs. Regular food supplies ensure food security and help reduce poverty and hunger.

5. Policy Recommendations

This section presents policy recommendations. Afghanistan must address the current challenges to achieve some of the selected SDGs.

5.1. Educational Empowerment

There is a need for the current government of Afghanistan to repeal all policies that prohibit women and girls from accessing educational opportunities. This should be from the grassroots level, that is. primary, secondary and tertiary levels. Funding opportunities should be provided, as well as targeting less privileged women and girls from marginalised communities. This will ensure that more women have access to education.

5.2. Technological Innovation

For the economy to grow, it is recommended that partnerships with the private sector and the international stakeholders be established to harness modern technology. This will assist women in agriculture, crafts and textiles, and those running different informal businesses. The government should provide financial resources ring-fenced to harness modern technology and support women with robust technological policies.

5.3. Improved Governance Systems

The current rules and policies of the Taliban limit the capacity of women to be fully active in the attainment of the SDGs. Governance systems must be updated to allow women to be fully active in the different sectors of the economy. The governance policies should be revised to ensure that the current challenges faced by women are addressed.

5.4. Employment Policies

The current labour market is pro-men with women not fully included in employment opportunities. The government must address this by ensuring that women with desirable qualifications and skills are appointed in jobs in the different sectors of the economy. The focus should be on the top government posts being reserved for women. This will reduce gender inequality and ensure that women can influence decisions that have a positive effect on the welfare of other Afghan women.

5.5. Social Security Programmes

The government needs to increase social security programmes to cater for the less privileged community members. These programmes should be centred on health provision, water and sanitation, cash grants and other welfare issues, focusing on women and girls and other members of society.

6. Conclusion

This research aimed to examine the challenges faced by Afghan women in the attainment of the SDGs. The study also examined the role women play in reducing poverty and hunger among other SDGs. Research findings described how women suffer from violence, unequal representation in the labour market, and the harsh rules meted out by the current government in Afghanistan. The role women play is critical as they help in employment creation and poverty alleviation. Several policies were recommended to address the challenges faced by Afghan women.

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