

Gender Equality in Afghanistan

_____The fifth Sustainable Development Goal also known as Gender Equality focuses on eliminating violence and discrimination against women, providing education to women, providing healthcare to women and their children and providing more representation for women in politics. Even after so many advances in technology and sciences, the basic rights of women are still violated. For example, In Saudi Arabia, women are not allowed to drive; they have to depend on their fathers and husbands for mobility (*Al Jazeera*). Many countries in South Asia force marry girls at young ages. Many Middle eastern countries believe that men are superior to women (*Al Jazeera*). Some countries did not allow women to serve in the army (“Ten examples of gender inequality in the world” *Borgen Magazine*). And, especially in Afghanistan many girls are not allowed to go to schools. Schools for girls are burnt down and the teachers - who were mostly women are beaten. The worst places for gender equality are Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, Yemen, Iran, and parts of Africa. Afghanistan is a country in south west Asia. Most girls in Afghanistan are forced to marry men double their age. Girls do not go to school and majorly manage household work. Almost 59% of married girls experienced sexual violence (*World Health Organization*).

_____United Nations and United Nations Women have several action programs; the most popular being He for She campaign. The campaign was endorsed by celebrities like Emma Watson. “He for She” calls for people to stand up against gender inequality and spreading awareness through creative means like singing, dances, protests, essay competitions etc. The campaign also collects donations and runs educational trainings. The campaign targets equal pay to women as men, accessibility to education and health resources, representation of women in

politics and elimination of violence against women. The child marriage rates have dropped from 45% in 1994 to 29% in 2016. Girls' access to education has also improved as more schools open up. Like United Nations, Women for Afghan Women (WAW) is an NGO that operates from Washington D.C., and fights for women's rights in Afghanistan. WAW provides shelters and human rights training in 16 provinces of Afghanistan. It is the largest shelter providing NGO in Afghanistan. It also conducts "women's rights are human rights" trainings ("What We Do" *Women for Afghan women*).

Ministry of Women's Affairs (MOWA) was established by the interim government of Afghanistan which was established after the fall of Taliban in 2001 ("Ministry of Women's Affairs" *Wikipedia*) . Under the Ministry of Women's Affairs, the Afghan government introduced National Action Plan for Women in Afghanistan (NAPWA) in 2008. There are three pillars of NAPWA that determine its missions: First pillar is security, the second pillar is governance, rule of law and human rights and the third pillar is economic and social development. NAPWA functions to provide access to health, education, employment and training to women. Although, NAPWA is said to be functioning since 2008, there is no evidence available to the public about its progress. Although, NAPWA has to submit its yearly progress reports to the president but somehow the government website is blank. NAPWA does conduct workshops and trainings frequently but it is uncertain how these help with the current crisis. The Afghan government also passed a bill called Elimination of Violence against Women (EVAW) laws. The EVAW laws were decreed by President Hamid Karzai in 2009. EVAW laws recognise 22 acts of violence against women as crime including child marriage, forced marriage, rape, beating, abusing etc. Other governmental organisations like MOWA or Ministry of Women's Affairs reports the cases

to EVAW which are then brought to justice. Although, the numbers of reported cases increased by 20%, the use of EVAW laws only increased by 2% in 2012 according to UN (*United Nations*). Only 7% of the reported cases were brought to justice by the EVAW laws (*United Nations*). The availability to justice for women still seems far away.

Mahatma Gandhi once said and I quote “*Be the change you want to see in the world*”. Although, the issue of gender inequality is being acted upon by many individuals and governments, it requires action from the people themselves. I can empower women by addressing unconscious biases against women in daily life. Many people discriminate against women during daily conversations. These may or may not be intentional but needs to be corrected. Change can only occur if we could shape the minds of people in the right way. I can also promote awareness of the issue in Afghanistan using social media. Today, social media is the most common way of communication and provides a strong platform to share views and information. I can also stop social media trolling by reporting hate comments and raise my voice against them. I can also empower my fellow female classmates to not to drop out of school. As of 2014, almost 5.3% of females drop out of high school in United States (*National Center for Education Statistics*). Lack of higher education reduces the chances for those students to get a job and a stable future. I can also spread awareness in our school about Women’s Rights. According to Women for Women International 85% of the women that enrolled in their programs did not know their rights (“*I Thought Only Men Had Rights*”). I think spreading awareness about the guaranteed rights women have is the best way to make women stand up for themselves and raise their voice against injustice.