

Gracie Triick

Coopersville High School

Coopersville, MI, United States of America

Afghanistan: Building a Better Future for Afghanistan

Building a Better Future for Afghanistan

According to the World Economic Forum, as of 2023, the average world literacy rate stands at 87%. Although this number has seemed to skyrocket in recent years, some countries still fall short in educating their population. One of these struggling countries is Afghanistan, with an average literacy rate of 37.3% as of 2022 (UNESCO, 2022). The source of this educational shortage in Afghanistan is due to several factors that ultimately make it difficult for Afghanistan's population, specifically the younger generations, to thrive. Afghanistan is landlocked and, for centuries, has been a go-between for its surrounding countries to wage war on each other. Not only does Afghanistan's location geographically increase political tension within the country itself, but it also leaves its population with limited access to valuable imports, including innovations necessary for bettering the country's economic state. In addition to the lack of resources, Afghanistan was invaded by the Taliban from 1996 to 2001 and still struggles to recover as a country from the physical damage and emotional turmoil that the Taliban left behind. In 2021, the Taliban was able to take back control of Afghanistan after being defeated in 2001 and has reversed a majority of the progress that Afghanistan was making toward a better education system. Over the past 20 years, Afghanistan has experienced an extreme amount of adversity, including drought, loss of government funding, lack of education, and increasing tyranny from the Taliban. These factors have led to the average Afghan child being left without proper access to education, food security, or even a safe place to call home.

Afghanistan is home to a population of approximately 43.4 million people as of 2024, with approximately 71% of that population living in rural areas. Afghanistan's government is an Islamic republic, leaving Afghan people with deep-rooted Islamic practices and norms that are prevalent throughout their day-to-day lives. Gender roles are very common throughout Afghanistan, and lots of family values are centered around honor and loyalty, especially toward family (Indiana University School of Medicine, 2021). Afghanistan's semi-arid, mostly dry climate makes for the perfect environment for farming wheat, the country's most prominent crop throughout its rural communities. The average Afghan family's paternal figure farms wheat, while the maternal figure takes care of the children. Their diet most often consists of products derived from the crops they grow, such as bread and cereal. However, the recent crises throughout Afghanistan, such as the Taliban invasions, droughts, and the aftermaths of war, have made it difficult for many Afghan citizens to thrive in their rural ways of life. In addition to this, remnants of the many wars that have been fought throughout Afghanistan have left many buildings destroyed, including several homes and schools, which makes it difficult for families to ensure that their children are properly cared for and able to gain an education.

According to the Global Hunger Index, 30.8% of people in Afghanistan experience food insecurity and are undernourished. This is primarily caused by the lack of access to job opportunities and stable employment for most Afghanistan citizens who are part of the lower class. Additionally, Afghanistan has suffered with drought for the past 5 years, which has affected approximately $\frac{1}{4}$ of Afghanistan's gross

domestic product, and the farming families that have been forced to leave their way of life as farmers and move to urban communities where they may not know when they will have access to their next meal (Islam et al., 2021). In addition to the environmental changes affecting the Afghan peoples' food security, government assistance has also become an issue. Monetary aid, which accounts for approximately 70% of government funding, has been threatened since the Taliban arrived and took back control of Afghanistan in 2021. This leaves the families who have struggled to make a living wage due to the unfortunate circumstances present in Afghanistan over the past few decades with little to no government aid or assistance to regain their position in the workforce.

The Taliban was a terrorist organization that took control of Afghanistan from 1996 to 2001, they are most well-known for being primarily responsible for the terrorist attacks of 9/11. Although the Taliban was defeated by the US in 2001, they were able to regain control over Afghanistan in 2021 and have since been able to reimplement the extreme restrictions they held on the Afghan population, especially in the education department. This organization is an extremely aggressive group and is especially violent towards females. During the first reign of the Taliban, young women and girls were not permitted access to education of any kind, causing the literacy rate in women in Afghanistan to drop to 0% under Taliban control, and even years shortly after that. Maryam, a young mother in Afghanistan who was born during one of the lowest points for female education, states that when her children ask her for help on their homework, she is unable to assist them because she is illiterate. When her eldest daughter got sick, she struggled to find a hospital to treat her because she couldn't read the signs for directions (Rahi/UNESCO, 2024). Today, the literacy rate of women in Afghanistan is 22.6%, which is one of the lowest globally, and a dramatic decrease from the literacy rate of men in Afghanistan, which is 52.1%, according to the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization. In addition to young women facing the effects of a lack of education present and available to them throughout their childhood, their daughters may be subject to the same fate, as the Taliban has forbidden young girls under the age of twelve from receiving any form of education. Furthermore, because of the lack of literacy among Afghan young adults today, it has become a struggle to find qualified educators in Afghanistan who are willing to teach the next generation. The Taliban also implemented a new law prohibiting female teachers from teaching young boys in Afghanistan. This ban had drastic effects on a shortage that was already massively present among educators in Afghanistan, as teaching has historically been a role primarily filled by women, especially in Afghanistan where gender roles are predominant among the population.

Since the Taliban reinvaded Afghanistan in August of 2021, the United States has provided 775 million dollars in humanitarian support toward bettering food security, agriculture, health, and education. Additionally, the US has also made efforts to connect with Taliban representatives to encourage a more inclusive government structure and less marginalization of minorities, like women and children. (U.S. Department of State, 2022). In addition to the continued aid provided to Afghanistan by several countries throughout the West, no country has officially recognized the Taliban as the government of Afghanistan. Although efforts to assist Afghanistan were strong in 2021 and remain present today, supporting countries have struggled to maintain motivation to assist, with little to no progress being made in the direction of more freedom for the Afghan people. According to the Center for Strategic and International Studies, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) originally set a goal of being able to contribute 4.6 billion dollars to Afghanistan through their Humanitarian Needs Response Plan. This goal has since dropped to 3.2 billion dollars, not because the original goal amount wasn't necessary, but simply due to a lack of funds readily available for the cause. The United Kingdom's funds toward Afghanistan

were also reduced in 2023 by over 70% and have not increased since then. These countries remain supporters of Afghanistan; however, they have found it increasingly difficult to provide such a significant amount of aid to the country as the reign of terror upheld by the Taliban only appears to be getting worse.

Afghan refugees have become prominent on a global scale, and assisting them in any way possible is another way to help the country in bettering their population. According to the United Nations Refugee Agency, as of 2023, there are 6.4 million reported Afghan refugees across the globe. Organizations like the *Afghan Coalition* and *Afghanaid* are present throughout America and have dedicated themselves to providing resources and assistance to Afghan refugees, like schooling for children and housing for families in need. Providing support either directly to refugees or to these organizations is a way to make a positive impact on the current state of the Afghan people and the trauma many of them have experienced.

Although Afghanistan has several major setbacks present throughout its current social, political, and economic infrastructures, not all hope should be lost. The major catalyst of the Afghan people's current struggles is the Taliban and the control it continues to maintain over the country. An effective way to combat these struggles is to continue sending aid to the Afghan people in the form of supplies to better their food security, like wheat seeds and farming equipment. If Afghanistan as a country can improve its food security, it will be able to strengthen its population over time, even under the control of the Taliban.

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