Sophia Renteria
4-H Youth Development
New Jersey, USA
Afghanistan, Human Rights, Education

Bint-e-Nanawatai Learning & Nutrition Hubs: A Refuge to Learn, A Future to Nourish

Upon returning from the European voyage, King Amanullah Khan promised to build a modernized civilization for his nation, Afghanistan. Fulfilling this promise when establishing the new flag's colors: black representing the nation's dark past, red defining the bloodshed for independence, and green capturing hope of a prosperous future. Today, that green stripe is viewed as an unkept promise to all 24,422,838 Afghan women (World Bank, 2025). Five years since Taliban's return to power, Afghan women are the world's most devastating example of systematic persecution. Specifically with proscribing education, cutting off knowledge that shapes everyday lives, particularly ensuring proper nutrition, resulting in one of the world's five largest hunger crises recorded, with 17.4 million Afghans facing severe levels of food insecurity (Mohammadi, 2026). As Dr. Samsor Zarin emphasizes, *"Malnutrition cases here are not due just to economic challenges, but they are suffering because their mothers are uneducated and do not know how to feed their children"* (Tolo News, 2022). If current policies stay, Afghanistan's food insecurity is only expected to worsen.

Background

Afghanistan, located in Southern Asia, north and west of Pakistan and east of Iran. With a population of 49.5 million (CIA 2025), 74% residing in rural areas, where households depend heavily on agriculture and livestock (World Bank, 2025). The Hindu Kush range divides the nation into 3 regions: the fertile northern plains, the rugged central highlands, and the arid southern plateau (CIA, 2025). The climate varies from arid to semi-arid, with hot, dry summers, cold winters, and irregular rainfall (BlueGreenAtlas). Afghan farmers generally operate on small plots averaging a size of 1.5 hectares. (Ahmadzai and Morrissey), where families heavily rely on seasonal mesophyte and cash crops: flax, sesame, soybean, liquorice, cotton, mung beans, and sunflower (Afgahnaid, 2024). Women traditionally manage livestock, dairy, and crop processing, though these roles are now prohibited due to Taliban policy restrictions (Qazizada, 2024). Men work in construction, agriculture,

livestock, mining, and porterage (Kazemi, 2020). The average monthly income for casual labor is AFN 3,522, covering only 70% of WFP's basic food basket (WFP, 2024), so families depend on local markets and homegrown food: naan, rice pilaf, stews, and kebabs (Together Women Rise, 2021). Nutrition is limited: many children eat only 2-3 food groups daily (Yolchi & Wang, 2025), contributing to 47% of young children (<5 million) suffering from stunting (IPC, 2024). Education crises persist, nearly half of all schools lack clean water, sanitation, or heating, while over 1,000 remain closed due to conflict or disasters (UNESCO, 2025).

Challenge & Impact

Since the Taliban's takeover in August 2021, more than 100 policies constrain access to girls' and women's access to education and employment opportunities, including the ban of continuing education beyond 6th grade, impacting over 2.4 million girls (UN News, 2026), while female labor force participation declined from 16.5% (2020) to 5.1% (2026), ranking Afghanistan second-lowest globally after Yemen (Hallam, 2026). As girls transition into mothers, education exclusion can negatively impact their families' diet and health; over 35 separate studies reported that children born to mothers without formal education are 2.19 times more likely to experience stunting compared with those whose mothers received higher education, and similar patterns observed for obesity, wasting, and coexisting forms of malnutrition (Khaliq et al., 2026).

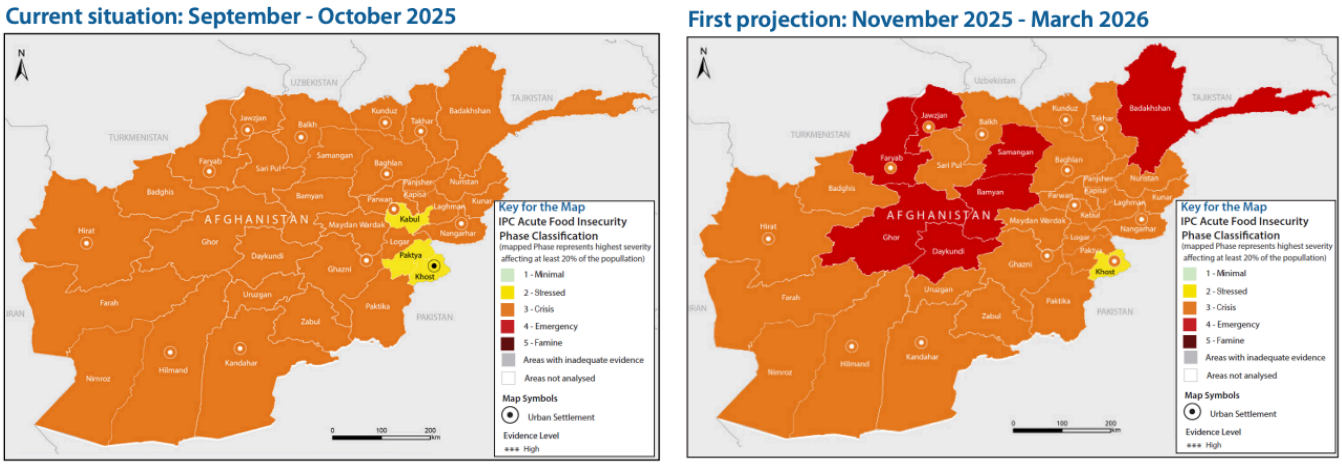
Loss of education worsens economic stability as women face fewer opportunities to earn income. Two-thirds of female-led households are unable to afford a basic diet, 20% more than male-led households. Desperate families resort to harmful coping methods, mainly early arranged marriage for their daughters (WFP, 2025). These restrictions harm all of Afghanistan: rural households face reduced agricultural productivity, while urban households become increasingly reliant on markets and employment opportunities. Both stemming from women's exclusion to enter the workforce. (WFP, 2025).

Furthermore, Afghanistan's food crisis is intensifying as humanitarian assistance declines and climate fluctuations further disrupt livelihoods. As 15 million Afghans face severe hunger, the World Food Programme (WFP) can support only one-third of that number, leaving a widening gap in emergency aid (WFP, 2025). Funding reductions removed 280,000 people from WFP's program and put 1.1 million pregnant women and children under 5 years old at risk of losing access to it entirely (WFP, 2025). Combined with other factors, including drought, reduced agricultural production, inflation, and limited employment opportunities, these further restrict access to nutritious food for Afghan women to feed themselves and their families. Afghanistan's worsening food crisis reflects not only immediate nutritional shortages but the educational and economic barriers that must be addressed to strengthen the nation.

Recommendation: Bint-e-Nanawatai Learning & Nutrition Hubs

I propose establishing Bint-e-Nanawatai Learning & Nutrition Hubs, a three-year community-based pilot focused on reducing household food insecurity in Afghanistan's rural regions, selected since the majority of Afghanistan's demographic are rural residents. 28 hubs will be split into 14 hubs amongst two groups to assess the program's adaptability and how its curriculum can be tailored to the varying environmental conditions. The Highlands Group includes Bamyan, Daykundi, Ghor, and Badakhshan, while the Northern Plains Group contains Faryab, Jawzjan, and Samangan.

Figure 1. IPC Acute Food Insecurity Analysis in Afghanistan



These provinces were selected based on IPC's projections identifying them as the areas projected to face the highest levels of food insecurity in the first projection, classified as IPC Phase 4. Integrated Food Security Phase Classification, https://www.ipcinfo.org/ipc-country-analysis/details-map/en/c/1159436/.

Each of the 14 hubs would accommodate 75 girls (ages 10–18) and 75 mothers or female caregivers, serving 150 participants annually. To maintain organization, the mother-girl pairs will be divided into three classes of 50 students: 25 girls and 25 mothers. Across all 28 hubs, the program would reach approximately 2,100 mother-girl pairs, or 4,200 total female participants annually. This structure supports intergenerational learning since girls and mothers learn the same 2 core subjects, nutrition and household skills, together. Both these girls and mothers can build on the knowledge given to them and apply these practical skills throughout their daily lives, and properly secure their households' diet and health.

Table 1. Hub Participant Distribution & Curriculum Structure

Class	Girls	Mothers	Total
Class 1- ELA & Math	25	25	50
Class 2 - Nutrition & Health	25	25	50
Class 3 - Food Production & Household Skills	25	25	50
Total	75	75	150

The weekly schedule combines education with practical household skills. Girls receive foundational English-language arts and mathematics instruction, while mothers receive functional literacy,

budgeting, and household-calculation lessons. Girls and mothers participate together in sessions on nutrition, child feeding, hygiene, WASH, ceramic pot-filter use, gardening, poultry care, food storage, and food preservation. The schedule will be adapted to agricultural seasons, local geographic conditions, and community preferences.

Geographic adaptation is built into the program. In the Highland Group, short growing seasons, cold winters, and snowfall require cold-tolerant crops, winter food storage, and protected poultry housing. Bamyan's cold, mountainous conditions limit vegetable growing to a maximum of five months annually, while the rest of the year is extremely cold or snowy (Ahmadi, 2026). Unlike the Northern Plains Group, where drought and rainfed-agriculture risks require water-conserving gardening and drought-tolerant crops. Faryab, Jawzjan, and Samangan are among Afghanistan's provinces facing the highest agricultural drought risk (Jamalzi et al., 2026).

Community-based education can sustain girls' learning under current restrictions by bringing instruction into accessible local settings. In 2025, UNICEF supported 437, 263 children through 14,000 community-based education classes in 34 provinces with 66% of the participant demographic being female (UNICEF, 2025). The Girls' Education Challenge similarly found that community-based approaches supported 30,002 Afghan girls, where teachers' training and support along with school management councils had contributed to stronger learning outcomes for girls (Girls' Education Challenge, 2023). However, education alone cannot eliminate food insecurity, families lack affordable environmental resources (food, land, water, seeds) , agricultural tools, or safe storage. To improve household food security, education should be paired with practical resources that allow women and girls to apply nutrition knowledge through gardening, poultry care, food preservation, and hygiene practices.

Combining education with food production has shown a positive trend in improving diets. A home-gardening trial found that combining gardening with nutrition education improved women's dietary diversity; women in the intervention group consumed 0.50 more food groups per day and

were 14% more likely to consume at least 5 food groups than women in the comparison group (Blakstad et al., 2021). Meaning women who received both gardening support and nutrition education ate wider food varieties, suggesting that households could apply nutrition knowledge to improve overall diet quality. A 2022 review also found that nutrition-sensitive agriculture programs generally improved children's dietary diversity, showing that household food-production activities can benefit not only women, but the entire family (Margolies et al., 2022). Similarly, a 2026 Bangladesh study showed that combining home gardens, poultry, nutrition education, and hygiene improved women's dietary diversity (Lambrecht et al., 2026). Together, these findings show that food-production support and nutrition education can help families eat healthier, more varied diets.

Improving nutrition also requires access to safe water and adequate hygiene practices. Women can build ceramic pot filters, as they provide a low-cost household treatment option, associated with decreasing diarrheal-disease (Gobana et al., 2023), which is the #1 frequent disease that kills Afghan people, particularly in children (Malikzai et al., 2026). Field performance varies with filter design and maintenance, so the program would test local water sources, use quality-controlled filters, teach maintenance, and offer alternative-treatment guidance when filtration is insufficient (Rao, Gouthami et alt, 2025).

The hubs are designed to operate within Afghanistan's current constraints. They would use existing homes, Women and Girls Safe Spaces, community buildings, and other trusted local venues, with women- and girls-only settings where required. Hubs would open only after community consultation, involving mothers and community elders. Schedules would be adapted to local conditions, and participant privacy would be protected. UNICEF has supported community-based education through local settings, and its Girls' Access to Teacher Education program supported more than 1,000 qualified female teachers to improve girls' enrollment and retention (UNICEF, 2026).
Staffing would draw on Afghanistan's former trained female teachers, around 66,000 female teachers since 2024 (UN News, 2026). Among recruiting qualified Afghan women as educators, facilitators, and mentors, it will also offer open volunteer opportunities for women interested in education or community service. Volunteers will shadow trained facilitators, assist with classroom prep and

receive mentoring and experience before proceeding to have a full established position. Allowing for local expansion of capacity while creating a pathway for women to develop teaching and leadership skills.

The program would work through a vetted humanitarian implementing partner and operate only in locations approved through that partner's legal, security, safeguarding, and community-consultation procedures. United Nations Security Council Resolution 2615 provides a humanitarian exemption for assistance that supports basic human needs in Afghanistan (United Nations Security Council, 2021). Potential partners include UNICEF for education and safe spaces, FAO for gardening and poultry support, WFP for food-security data, WHO for nutrition referrals, and CAWST for ceramic-filter testing and training.

Girls ages 10–18 and their mothers are the program's primary learners. Girls build foundational literacy, numeracy, and nutrition knowledge, while mothers develop functional literacy, budgeting, child-feeding, gardening, food-preservation, hygiene, and safe-water skills. Together, they can apply this knowledge to household decisions and daily practices. Households may benefit from more diverse diets, home-grown foods, safer water, and improved food storage. Community elders and local leaders help ensure local acceptance; in return, communities can benefit from healthier children and stronger local capacity.

Before classes begin, staff would collect baseline data on literacy, numeracy, nutrition knowledge, women's dietary diversity, household food security, garden and poultry production, water sources, and ceramic-filter use. Monitoring would track enrollment, attendance, quiz scores, household visits, garden and poultry survival, filter condition, and nutrition referrals.

Expected impacts would develop over time. Short-term outcomes include improved literacy, numeracy, and nutrition knowledge. Medium-term outcomes include greater dietary diversity, more household gardens, improved poultry production, and more consistent ceramic-filter use. Long-term outcomes include improved household food security and child dietary diversity.

Challenge & Limitations

Education alone cannot solve hunger, so the program combines learning with gardening, poultry care, food preservation, safe-water practices, nutrition education, and health referrals. It complements rather than replaces emergency food assistance and healthcare. Activities will be adapted to local water, soil, and climate conditions; ceramic filters will be used only after water testing and technical approval. Former teachers and qualified women with relevant health, nutrition, or agricultural experience will be recruited. Although the hubs cannot solve the national crisis as a whole, the pilot would test a focused model across seven cities that could be expanded if we see the program demonstrating positive results under two core areas: women's access to basic education and combating food insecurity.

Conclusion

Afghanistan's food crisis is shaped not only by food shortages but also by restrictions on women's and girls' education, employment, and access to practical knowledge. Bint-e-Nanawatai Learning & Nutrition Hubs respond by bringing girls and mothers together in trusted local spaces for foundational education, nutrition, hygiene, safe-water practices, gardening, poultry care, and food preservation. The program adapts activities to the Highlands' cold, short growing seasons and the Northern Plains' drought risks. The hubs serve to test whether community-based learning improves women's access to basic education and household food security for at the moment, the seven cities. helping Afghan women turn knowledge to combat food insecurity, and build stronger futures for them and their families. By restoring women's access to knowledge, Bint-e-Nanawatai Learning & Nutrition Hubs can help Afghanistan women finally fulfill the green stripe's promise, growing a more prosperous future where women can lead their families toward lasting food security.

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