

CHAPTER SIX

THE STATE OF WOMEN'S EDUCATION IN AFGHANISTAN

Humaira Haqmal

ABSTRACT

Under the old order, with its rural patterns and pernicious tribal culture and its harsh, cruel, chauvinistic despotism and precious little to enjoy in the way of culture, Afghan women were, and indeed still are, deprived of the most fundamental social and human rights and freedom. This deprivation in turn deprives society of development, especially as regards consolidating the basic functions of education. Another fundamental reason why women are deprived of their basic human rights is the lack of security and the long-running wars that still drag on in Afghanistan. Even now, warring factions still concentrate their activities on closing down and burning schools, depriving women of their education.

At present, International Security Assistance Forces are deployed in Afghanistan.

When these international forces withdraw, they are unlikely to leave behind them a government that is sound, democratic for all and politically stable, something which is a cause for concern and indeed fear, among Afghans in general, and women in particular.

Key words:

Education, war, security, male chauvinism

■ EDUCATION AND SECURITY FOR WOMEN IN AFGHANISTAN

Education is one of the fundamental topics for discussion in today's societies, and especially in developing societies. The practical subjects of this research seem simple enough, and we can affirm the importance to women of learning science, and education in both dangerous and calm situations, irrespective of the kinds of threats or physical and psychological dangers or of there being the time, opportunities and significant facilities for learning.

Nevertheless, the subject of education is not so simple. It is, however, a right accorded to all persons under national and international law. In practice, research methods differ from one country to another depending on the political, social, economic and cultural circumstances of each. We shall endeavour to apply the rules of Afghanistan, but first of all it is important to distinguish the definitions used in the research.

■ Education

Education is unquestionably the fundamental basis of social work in the community. Education offers a bright future to us all. Access to education is a right of every human being, particularly women, irrespective of race, family, language, social standing, etc. Education represents a change to and an advance in the mental and social ability to investigate, think and practise. According to a famous scientist and doctor from the Islamic world, Abu Ali Sina Balkhi, education means planning the community's activity for the health of the family and the growth of the children in a society throughout life and after death.

We all know that the root of the fine green plant of modernisation is in the soil provided by education. The importance of education in modernising life is so clear that it does not require explanation.

■ The right to education under the rules of Afghanistan

In Afghanistan there are no legal obstacles to women studying. According to Afghanistan's Islamic laws, all persons may study and men and women have the same rights. Women, in fact, are actually granted certain privileges. According to the tenets of Islam, someone who has three daughters or sisters and brings them up well will go to heaven. According to Article 21 of Afghanistan's new constitution, any type of discrimination towards men or women is forbidden; the right to education is the same for all citizens of Afghanistan. Articles 43 and 44 of the Afghan constitution state that all Afghan citizens have the right to education. Article 43 provides for free public

education up to degree level. The government is responsible for providing all educational opportunities to the Afghan people, particularly in the field of teaching national languages. Article 44 of the Afghan constitution focuses on women's education. The government is responsible for promoting education for women, improving education programmes and applying appropriate measures for education and to combat illiteracy in Afghanistan.

It is clear that all Afghans have the right to study, and no-one can deprive them of this right. Regrettably, however, many problems remain, such as the lack of security - a major reason for not being able to exercise the right to study.

Impeding women's right to education is an offence under Article 35 of the constitution, subject to six months imprisonment.

However, in contravention of the Afghan constitution and Islamic law, women encounter many problems due to misguided customs, which prevent them from making proper use of these rights. In the Afghan community nearly 90% of the population is illiterate.

Regrettably, the majority of these are women, and this is the responsibility not only of the Afghan government or the international community, but also of educated women, who must co-operate with their community and help their sisters.

According to its M.D.G. (Millennium Development Goals), the government aims to have 100% of children attending school by 2015, 50% of them girls.

There are many problems in the way of attaining this objective. The ineffectiveness of schools in the country –especially girls' schools–, the lack of security and the lack of facilities are major reasons why girls drop out of school. The effectiveness of schoolteachers may be another reason. The right to education is established in international documents, particularly in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women. The introduction to the Convention (of 18 December 1979) notes that the United Nations Charter establishes equal rights for all human beings and the principle of non-discrimination.

To resolve these concerns, the countries signing the Convention decided:

1. To guarantee women's right to equality with men in professional education.
 2. To grant the same rights as to men in the education sector, with the same resources.
 3. To strive to promote training and review of curriculum contents in books and courses.
-

4. To enable women to acquire scholarships and educational benefits.
5. To plan for women's education and literacy in order to narrow the education gap between men and women.
6. To commit to reducing the school drop-out rate among girls.
7. To provide information for special education, including family planning.

Also, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, in Article 26 concerning the right to education, states that all persons have the right to education.

In the second paragraph we read that education must be directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms.

In conclusion, it can be said that the right to education is the same for both women and men. Nevertheless, for various reasons, Afghan women have been deprived of their rights. In 2000 many obligations relating to girls' and women's access to education were assumed at a worldwide level, in the Dakar World Forum on Education, which was attended by 180 countries. They undertook to ensure that by 2015 all children would be in school.

Since then, much attention has been given to education, but there are nine countries that still lag far behind. One of them is Afghanistan, where only 51% of boys and 44% of girls go to school. According to world reports on Afghanistan, in 2002 37% of boys and 18% of girls attended school, but in 2007 65% of boys and 35% of girls were in school. Regarding the current situation, according to a publication of the Ministry of Education, in 2012, 8.39 million children were in school, and 39% of them were girls.

■ Definition of security

Security, according to the constitution, is the absence of violence. John Mars says: "Security means being free of dangerous violence". Arnaldo Wolfar says: "Security is the absence of violence at work".

And in its psychological dimension: "Security is the absence of fear of attacks on the values of life".

Dominic David also defines it as: "creating a space in which someone is not in danger". This can be created with the help of the military. A country's national security is the wish of its peoples. And sincerity and rules are the only way to achieve security. We must not forget that security is the only way to achieve a country's objectives. The results of the existence of rules and objectives are: honesty and progress on the economy and education.

■ Review of the situation regarding women's education to 1978

Afghanistan is an ancient country in which education has been imparted in accordance with tradition and with the prevailing situation at any given time. Girls were not educated at school but by educated persons, mainly family members. This education had no official standing; in other words they were taught in religious centres, at home, in the Royal Court, etc. In the second period of the government of Emir Shir Ali Khan, reforms were undertaken in several areas, and considerable attention was also given to education. Two military schools and a modern civilian school were established. During the reign of Emir Habibullah Khan, only one military school and the Habibia school were active, and they were attended only by boys, while adults studied at home. In some important families, women studied at home under a domestic tutor, father, brother, uncle, etc, learning subjects such as literature, geography, arithmetic, etc, and it was these women who, during the reign of King Amanullah from 1919 onward, were employed as teachers in girls' schools.

During the reign of King Amanullah (1919-1929), much attention was given to women's and girls' education, with central and provincial schools being established and special schools for girls opened. 1923 saw the passing of the country's first constitution, which acknowledged the right to education for all citizens of Afghanistan, and also established that education was free for all and primary education was compulsory.

During this period particular attention was paid to the role of women in social life and development, and the process of liberating women as equal citizens began. To this end the school for girls and the Naswan Association for Married Women were established. The first Naswan school was established in 1921, administered by the King's sister. Queen Soraya (King Amanullah's consort) took on the administration of the school in Kabul with the help of a number of outstanding women. This period also saw the launch of the magazine *Ershadul Naswan*. The Queen also established a special hospital for women in Kabul in 1924. Amanullah Khan, among his social reforms, sent girls to obtain higher education in medicine and nursing in Turkey. He not only prohibited forced marriages and child marriages, but also imposed constraints on the practice of polygamy. He also established minimum ages for marriage: 22 for men and 18 for women.

Despite the problems of the time and the threats that King Amanullah received in his struggle against the traditionalists, the government's programme of reforms was a special achievement for women's rights.

One brave Afghan woman was prepared to go to prison in her quest to free Afghan women from the veil or the *chadori (burka)*, she stood up in the Loya

Jirga and removed her *chadori* from her face, tore it in front of the members of the Loya Jirga and declared the freedom of Afghan women.

This brave woman, who fought throughout her life for the emancipation of Afghan women, especially in the twentieth century, was none other than Queen Soraya, daughter of Mahmoud Tarzi and wife of Emir Amanullah Khan, who, together with her husband, carried out the great reforms offering women relative freedom, such as the establishment of the Naswan Association referred to above, the publication of special magazines for women and the establishment of girls' schools.

Ghobar writes in his book *Afghanistan in the Course of History*, in 1921, that on the day Queen Soraya spoke in a meeting of the women of the world and how far behind the women of Afghanistan were, the women present at the meeting wept in sorrow. And fifty of them volunteered to teach and founded the first school for Afghan women. The Queen was so impressed that she also took on the role of inspector of Mastorat school.

King Amanullah strove to establish modern education for women in the centre and in the provinces of Afghanistan. Finally, the actions of the *reformist king* raised the ire of the traditionalist forces and he was faced with enormous challenges. He passed numerous laws on equal rights for men and women, but unfortunately many of them were repealed after his abdication. Apart from this, in view of the angry reaction of the opposition, subsequent kings took greater care and gave less attention to equality between men and women and the increase in women's activities in social, political, economic and cultural areas.

With the fall of King Amanullah, the promotion of women's advancement faced many threats, and the schools closed their doors to Afghan women and girls. Modern education disappeared with the coup d'état of Emir Habibullah, known as "Bacha Saqaw" (the water-carrier's son). Once again Afghan women and girls were kept out of education.

From 1930 onward, boys' schools began to be opened. Girls' schools, however, were closed. In 1932 girls' schools were opened once more. Education developed little by little, but not in a balanced way. Later, on 10 December 1948, the Afghan government signed the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which mentions the right to education.

Opportunities for women increased dramatically in the 1950s. They were included in the labour force dealing with the public and in government offices. As regards higher education, they were able to attend university either in Afghanistan or abroad, and during this period they also had opportunities

to take part in Parliament, in government ministries and in drawing up the constitution of 1946, which grants women the same rights as men. Despite these measures, modernisation progressed very slowly. However such progress as was made was strong and effective.

During the presidency of Sardar Mohammad Daud Khan in the 1960s, the education which had begun in the past was developed, and a large number of Afghan girls and boys had access to schools. They studied together at university and went abroad for higher education. Female Afghan teachers taught university students medicine and public health. A large number of women graduated from the Kabul Faculty of Medicine.

Women served the country. In all, hundreds of thousands of educated women and hundreds of thousands of girls were busy learning and educating themselves in freedom and in a democratic atmosphere in the capital and the provinces of Afghanistan. At the University of Kabul thousands of women and girls were busy studying the specialities of medicine, law, literature, journalism, education, economics, science, agriculture, fine arts, religion and other fields of knowledge.

■ The situation regarding women's education following the Revolution of 1978

During the regime of the Democratic Party of Afghanistan, Afghan women were in a worthy position, as they had been during the regime of Mohammad Daud and before. Together with men, women could pay to obtain education, and took part in social, economic, cultural and political activities, playing an effective role in developing the various life processes. At this stage great importance was attached to women's learning and education, and the path to making this vision a reality was very quickly set out. Regrettably, this was followed by undesirable results in the most reactionary sections of the people of this country of traditionalists.

From 1978 to 1992, women played a very positive role, actively participating in manufacturing, education, politics and cultural activities.

In the 1980s women accounted for 70% of teachers and 40% of doctors, as well as 50% of public sector employees.

The Education Programmes gave much attention to women and girls who had dropped out of school, and also to the situation of girls' and women's education. They were allowed to raise their level of education, and encouraged to go abroad to pursue their higher education, as a result of which they gained considerable knowledge and experience. However, for the first time, suspicions arose to the effect that Afghan women were associating

with opposition political groups whose members were being tortured in the country's prisons. Also with the parents, brothers and sisters, husbands and other relatives of girls and women who were in prison accused of political crimes. Persecuted by the current regime and confronted with threats and investigations, women in rural areas, together with other civilians, were subjected to continual harassment.

Further illegal acts, which were followed by civil war, led to women being deprived of the right to participate in the country's social, cultural, economic and political life. Women and children were exposed to attacks with artillery and other weapons including tanks, armed conflicts, kidnappings and rape and lived in a state of extreme stress. Millions of affected Afghans, the majority of them women, regrettably found themselves having to seek refuge in neighbouring countries. Most of them, given the lack of even minimal services for internal migration, were in a desperate state. The civil war had been so terrible that they were obliged to make material and spiritual sacrifices, and most of these were made by women.

In the Islamic system, with the jihadist parties, women and their rights were threatened and put at grave risk. Women suffered more than any one else, not just through losing a husband, brother or son in the war between the Mujahedin factions, but also because they were threatened or taken captive when they left their homes by groups of armed jihadist men who abused them. They suffered insult and humiliation, and if raped alone, being subsequently thrown onto streets or bridges and shot dead. The population witnessed hundreds of thousands of shameful acts and crimes in Kabul committed by the armed groups of the jihadist parties. One is almost too ashamed to write this.

Regrettably, as well as domestic violence against Afghan women, group violence, ethnic, linguistic and religious, in the period of the jihadist regime starting in 1992, is perhaps unique of its kind in the world. Sadly we must remember that, when the jihadist groups entered Kabul starting the internal power struggle, women suffered the most brutal violence at the hands of armed men, which reached a state which words alone cannot describe. In various parts of Kabul, especially in areas such as the narrow and stony Khot-e-Sangi, Karta-e-Chart, Makroreyan and Debory, crates full of women's bodies were seen, body parts were pulled and others were forced to eat them at gunpoint so as to instil terror into the population.

Other crimes committed by armed groups included attacks on women's mental hospitals, whose inmates were raped. In Day Dana, Karta-e-Se and Karta-e-Naw, –the residential areas of Kabul,–there were widespread sexual assaults on elderly women who were protecting their homes, without regard

to their age, and there were reports of many virgin girls committing suicide out of fear of losing their honour to the attacks of the jihadist commanders. In Makruryan-e-Sewom, a girl who had been attacked by one of the jihadist commanders who then wanted to abuse her in her home, committed suicide in order to preserve her honour, throwing herself from the fifth floor of a building. The following day the people protested, and some went to the Professor Rabbani's presidential palace to voice their opposition to these crimes, but gunmen opened fire on the demonstrators, wounding several people and silencing the protest.

The Afghan people, and especially the people of Kabul, will never be able to forget the destruction, murder, kidnapping, robbery and rape perpetrated by the criminals who held power, or the intensification of conflicts over life, property, language and ethnic minorities during the jihadist regime..

Such were the scandals of the jihadists' standards, which lead to the arrival of the Taliban regime, headed by Mullah Muhammad Omar. The Taliban were more fundamentalist than their predecessors such as Professor Rabbani, Professor Saiaf, Sheikh Alhadis Mohseni, the studious Professor Khalili or engineer Hekmatyar. Having seized power, the Taliban applied the rules established during the rule of the Mujahideen in Afghanistan, and made them even stricter.

With the adoption of the rule "amer bil ma'roof wa nahi anel munkar" (doing good and forbidding evil), women found themselves deprived of education and studies, with the doors of schools and universities closed to them.

The Taliban forbade women to leave home unless accompanied by a male relative, and deprived them of the right to work in government or non-government departments. The rules governing the cutting off of a hand and a foot flourished under the religious extremists, and the sports arena became a human butchery. Women were prohibited from visiting male doctors. Bus and taxi drivers were not allowed to carry unaccompanied women, and those with no-one to accompany them, with widows suffering greatly as a result. On top of this, bread became almost impossible to buy. Some women had lost their families in the civil war and girls under ten years of age dressed as boys in order to be able to leave their homes.

The arrival of the Taliban regime, the more so as it was to some extent foreign interference in internal Afghan affairs, was a tremendous imposition on the Afghan people, and especially on women. The Taliban extremists came to put an end to the Mujahideen regime, which had had the objective of creating secure and stable conditions in which to take control of the country.

To continue using a greater source of uncertainty, not just in Afghanistan, but creating a worldwide network of insecurity. They played an important role in the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001. The thinking of the Taliban meant not only that Afghan women had to endure terrible suffering, but also made the world focus on the ugly face of terrorism in the name of Islam, the religion of mercy, which sought to justify itself by devotion to the religion.

The Taliban forbade women to take part in public life and effectively confined them to their homes. In this dark, dark period, proud women who gloried in Afghan liberty once more made valiant contributions to freedom and, in heroic combat, those who were caught without the veil, the symbol of shame and humiliation they called the "Islamic hijab", suffered beatings in the streets.

The veil, we should make clear, was popularised in Kabul by Afghan nobles or aristocrats who had emigrated to India and the families of clerics in the late nineteenth century. It arrived in Afghanistan and its use was later promoted among urban women under an authoritarian regime gradually extended into the twenty-first century by clerics who thought that this kind of *chadori dolaq* was a sign of distinction or preference, of an aristocratic and spiritual family. So in other words the veil was never chosen because of Afghan or Islamic customs.

Afghan women used large veils and good, coloured clothes, and regarded it as a symbol of chastity, (Five-Year *Daily Review*, issues 3 and 4, Sanbula and Aqrab 1383). The odious behaviour of the Taliban has given rise to a worldwide revulsion against a senseless phenomenon, not only for the women of Afghanistan but for everyone in the world, symbolised by the damnable acts of these vile terrorists. This government was not in accordance with the religion, and people were not in agreement with its unjust political, economic and cultural rules.

■ **The situation concerning women's education after the fall of the Taliban: renewed hope and promise**

During the twentieth century, conflicts and disputes about women's rights and the role of women gradually established a central place in Afghan society and national life. Women not only suffered to uphold the dignity of their families, but also to be a symbol of opposition and pride of their nation.

The issue of gender is an important one, which for the past hundred years has been at the forefront of Afghan politics. Those opposed to women's rights considered that the reform measures adopted in this regard were non-Islamic acts leading to the loss of virtue and sanctity of the family and reproached women for it. In the years of conflict, the lack of security for women was caused by the extremists, who attached no value to women's role in society.

These ideas were propagated more and more and throughout the period of war, women were subjected to serious human rights violations. The restrictions imposed on them as regards transport made it impossible for them to access basic services such as healthcare.

With the fall of the Taliban regime in November 2001, Afghanistan acknowledged the idea that women form half of society.

The early stages saw the signing of the Bonn Agreement, which stressed the role of women, giving rise to the setting up of an exclusive governmental organisation: the Department of Women's Affairs. The bases of a strategy were established, along with the phases for accommodating the growth and development of the characterisation of women in the framework of national development.

The fall of the Taliban, following a long struggle, gave rise to some positive changes in various areas of Afghan life, especially women's lives. The vast expanse that is Afghanistan once more bears witness to how, with the fall of the extremists, Afghan women emerged from political isolation and succeeded in taking part in public, social, economic and cultural life, how they regained access to education and employment and, to a certain extent, shared in decision making and in the peace and reconstruction of the country. With the advent of new means of communication and the opening of educational institutions and education and professional association the role of women has been expanded.

The main changes that the new situation brought women included their participation in the process of drawing up the constitution of 2003 and also entry to the Upper House (Wolesi Jirga), where 64 of the 250 seats are reserved for women, in accordance with the constitution. According to section 3 of Article 84 of the Afghan Constitution, the third institution, the group of members of the Wolesi Jirga chosen by the country's President, comprises persons with experience, among them two members of the disabled and two representatives of the nomads, fifty percent of them women. In accordance with Article 83 of the Constitution, in line with the average population of each province, at least two parliamentarians of each in the Lower House (Meshrano Jirga) are women. 25% of the seats in the Wolesi Jirga and 17% of those in the Meshrano Jirga were therefore assigned to women. Article 22 of the country's new constitution prohibits any kind of discrimination among citizens of Afghanistan, and men and women have the same rights and duties. Women have also been assigned cabinet positions: in the Ministries of Women's Affairs, Health, Labour and Social Affairs, Martyrs and the Disabled. The Independent Commission on Human Rights and the Saramyasht (Office for Support in Disaster Situations) were entrusted to women.

Afghan women, whether educated or illiterate, have spoken up in the struggle for human rights. In the first Loya Jirga, 11% of delegates involved were women. This figure has since doubled and continues to increase. 44% of voters in the presidential elections of 2004 were women. 25% of delegates to the *Peace Loya* of 2010 and 25% of delegates to the 2011 Loya Jirga were women.

The new constitution is the most important guarantee of the position of women in all aspects of Afghan society. Adopted on 4 January 2004, it prohibits all forms of discrimination among citizens of Afghanistan. It also establishes the commitment to give Afghan women greater prominence in education programmes and medical facilities. However, the threats against their presence in society have also increased. Before the Mujahideen and the Taliban, women had been active in the field of mass media, and are so now once more. At first, in the area of media and publishing, there were some thirty magazines for women published in Kabul and other provinces, and this figure has since increased.

Although the new Afghan constitution is laudable in granting equal rights to women and expanding their participation in politics, implementing and executing it is perhaps one of the most important challenges facing Afghanistan. Apart from this, the lack of security has not only been an impediment to development and rehabilitation in Afghanistan, it has also proved a serious obstacle to women's advancement. Many women and girls are unable to go to school, and some have been murdered or suffered physical and psychological violence in schools.

But security is not the only significant problem or challenge to women's participation in various fields and to their making full use of their rights. The different types of controls in the country, the culture of complacency and women's way of life have limited their role in civil, cultural, economic, political and social life at all levels of society. Women feel they are victims of gender-based violence, whether stemming from past conflicts or from the persistent lack of security or by reason of the political conflicts and instability in Afghanistan.

The high rate of illiteracy among women and girls is not just a challenge and an obstacle to their participation in all aspects of society, its also jeopardises the situation of the individual, the family and the welfare of the community. To the extent that freedom, democracy, human rights and equality for men and women are now being openly discussed, it would seem that everything is on the right track towards being achieved in accordance with the objectives.

Regrettably however, life for Afghan women today is, in many cases, tragic and sad. Hanging over them is the odious, sinister shadow that envelops the

thinking and ignorance of some individuals and groups that have obtained large amounts of money by raiding the public coffers and from drug dealing. These people are trying to prevent Afghan women from moving forward, and want to keep them under an unjust oppression.

The centre of the country is well prepared in the fields of primary education, and there are a few positions occupied by women in the city, but in other provinces and outlying areas of the country in both rural and urban zones, women still find themselves deprived of all natural and human rights. Certain groups and persons devoid of all human morality are involved in kidnapping, rape and human trafficking, –with girls even having been offered for sale in foreign markets, particularly Pakistan and the Gulf states – as well as forced marriage. Due to the existence of these groups, Afghan women and girls have to remain prisoners in their homes in order to protect their honour and reputation, and they are obliged to hide their faces and eyes from these despicable thugs.

■ RESEARCH INTO THE EDUCATION AND SECURITY OF WOMEN IN AFGHANISTAN

■ Introduction to the research

Human beings are obliged to prepare the place where they live. Our curiosity will always see us try, with our abilities as they are and through the use of our intelligence, to destroy the curtain of dark thoughts from times past and, observing the reality of a thousand years ago, to see that the world we live in is progressing day by day. This development and transformation of life is possible with the help of intelligence, opportunities and facilities attained through family, society and government. Education is the real strength of people and government, because education means growth, development and progress in the physical, social, psychological, speculative, mental and technical capacity of humans.

The right to education is a way of developing economic and social rights, since education is crucial for access to a better standard of living, the eradication of poverty, combating child labour and generational equality. Education helps women to play a full part in the country's social and political life. This right can also be assured in other ways, and here access to healthcare, economic growth and significant and progressive social development can be of help.

- *Main purpose*

This research paper presents the following main objectives:

1. To search for and ascertain the causes preventing women from having access to education in Afghanistan despite the efforts of the countries involved and of international society.
2. To present the results of this research to the foundations, organisations and, in general, international society, with a view to their continuing with their collaboration as hitherto in the field of women's education until such time as women can acquire the full wealth of education and participate in the country's progress.

- *Necessity and importance of the research*

In recent years Afghanistan has been faced with significant problems of illiteracy, especially among women. Regrettably, scientific bodies and researchers have not given much attention to this serious matter; in fact they have done little work on it or have studied it from a limited perspective. Also, this work has only been accepted by a few, and read by even fewer people who are in a position to accept their conclusions and diagnoses of the factors currently impeding women's education: wars, the lack of access to sound modern methods and the lack of strategic programming by governments and political groups. Therefore we need to research the importance of women's education and the factors preventing it, as well as security and women's access to education in Afghanistan. This research has been carried out impartially.

- *Method*

We shall attempt to study security in Afghan women's education, using scientific and academic methods in two aspects: theoretical and scientific. Of course, in the theoretical research we used internal and external current sources, in order to explain the matter clearly, then questions were prepared, after which the scientific (practical) research started.

In the scientific research we held meetings, sent out questionnaires and conducted interviews, so as to obtain ideas and points of view from people to illustrate the real social situation. In this way we sought to obtain reliable results.

- *Social statistics*

In this research we sought to ascertain the reasons for women's lack of access to education and the lack of security necessary in order to be able to study in Afghanistan. These social statistics should cover the whole social spectrum of Afghanistan, but this was not possible due to lack of time and security problems. We have statistics for Kabul society only. Kabul has 14 districts and 18 neighbourhoods, of which we researched only 5 districts.

- *Area of study*

The study area is confined exclusively to the province of Kabul, including several of its districts. In each neighbourhood we presented a number of questionnaires based on its population. The third district turned out to be the one with the most questionnaires (157) while the eleventh district was the one with the fewest (21) (see Table 6-1)

Table 6-1. Areas of study, number of women interviewed and percentage

Areas of study	Number of women interviewed	Percentage
Third district	157	31,4
Fifth district	131	26,2
Ninth district	102	20,4
Eleventh district	21	4,2
Sixteenth district	89	17,8
Total	500	100

- *Ages of the women interviewed*

The ages of the women interviewed were divided into three groups (see Table 6-2).

1. Women aged between 16 and 35.
2. Women aged between 35 and 50.
3. Women aged over 50.

Table 6-2. Number of women interviewed by age groups

Groups	Number of women interviewed	Percentage
Between 16 and 35	250	50
Between 35 and 50	160	32
Over 50	90	18
Total:	500	100

- *Data gathering methods*

In order to acquaint ourselves with the subject of the research, we started out from a situation in which the importance of women's education was very limited. The quantitative method is a normal method used in social sciences for obtaining data. Quantitative research is an approach used to obtain this data.

The data was requested from specific groups of people who responded to the questions, which were similar for all. These responses form part of the research data. This system is a very simple form of social research. Direct questions and interviews were used which are ultimately another way of asking the questions. In the discussion section, extensive use was made of the internet, books and other written sources. In the research questionnaires the questions and answers were in writing. Among the auditors of the research are people with extensive knowledge of women's education, representatives from the government and from private sector bodies.

- *Calendar*

Table 6-3. Calendar

Phase	Date	Working process
1	From 15 December 2011 to 5 January 2012	Delivery of questionnaires, proposal of basic questions. Research assumptions and rules for the questionnaires
2	From 6 January to 30 January 2012	Research by areas
3	From 1 February to 15 February 2012	Computerisation of data

- *Educational level of the women interviewed*

They were classified into six categories: illiterate, literate, graduate, higher degree, masters and doctorates (see Table 6-4).

The small number of women with doctorates interviewed reflects the very small number of women with that qualification in the country.

Table 6-4. Number de women interviewed by level of education

Level of education	Number of women interviewed	Percentage
Illiterate	38	7,6

Level of education	Number of women interviewed	Percentage
Literate	96	19,2
Graduates	275	55
Holding higher degrees	63	12,6
Masters	21	4,2
Doctorates	7	1,4
Total:	500	100

- *Questionnaire*

The specific research questions were:

1. Is security essential for education?
2. Do men and women have the same rights?
3. What are the factors causing the lack of security and the lack of education for women?
4. How can we guarantee the security of women's education?
5. How can we bring down the high level of illiteracy among Afghan women?
6. Can women with education make the country or the community advance?

Assumptions:

1. The lack of security and many other factors impede women's education in Afghanistan.
2. Women's education is very important for our country.
3. Education is a cause of progress, promotion and development in women's lives.
4. Education is a motive for attaining gender equality and social mobility.
5. Educated women are very active, and take part in various activities.
6. Identifying the factors of lack of security in women's education may help in reducing this problem.

- *Problems with the research*

Researching data on social culture has always been faced with problems, and this research was no exception. At no time did these problems affect our determination to attain the objective. The main problem we encountered from the start was the lack of written source material on the subject, much of which

unfortunately still remains to be researched in our country, no international organisation having worked on this kind of research.

The second obstacle to our research was the social educational level, which is painful to observe and caused us heartache, and the women's and girls' lack of interest in the research phenomenon.

Two statistical groups here showed important differences: those with a high level of education were reluctant to answer due to a mistrust of strangers. And in some cases they treated the researchers very badly.

This comes as no surprise. It is a result of the continual wars in our country, which has led to a culture of war that is opposed to peace and conciliation. The lack of security may be the only reason for this behaviour. It illustrates how badly social culture is needed.

The other group, who were illiterate, thought we wanted to help them, which is why they answered our questions.

We were unable to investigate more deeply for lack of time.

■ Research procedure

- *Information on research data*

Table 6-5. Reasons why Afghan girls and women do not have access to schooling

Factors in lack of access to education	Number	Percentage
The family does not allow it	173	34,6
Lack of security	126	25,3
Lack of access for girls	111	22,3
Family's weak financial situation	90	18
TOTAL	500	100

The data makes it clear that the family is the main factor preventing women from having access to education.

The reasons for which a boy and especially a girl can or cannot be included in schooling depend directly on the situation of the family and the allocation of responsibilities within it.

In general, the decision-making power rests with the head of the family, who is always a man. But this decision making is influenced by special factors

concerning how family opinions are formed as to whether or not girls go to school, which in turn are heavily influenced by social norms.

In the opinion of intellectuals and from the point of view of men, the present structure leads to social and cultural discrimination against women. The kind of mentality regarding the nation's boys and girls which attributes great value to males and very little to girls, who are submissive and resigned. Some psychologists say that it is this lack of attention to women on the part of families that produces a male-orientated society in which men hold all the power while women stay at home with their mothers.

Boys and girls are brought up differently, from birth, and there is no concept of equality in people's attitudes towards their sons and daughters. The weight of culture and custom still prevent the country from modernising. In the traditional system, a woman is not free, and lives not as an independent person but as the wife of her husband and the mother of her children, while a girl lives as the daughter of her father and the sister of her brothers. She is not thought of as an independent person, but always as an adjunct to a man. Even nowadays, social customs make it impossible to imagine women as equal to men, and lawmakers still take no account of society's evolution over time. Our society is part of our religion: both the lawmakers and people in general see men and women as different. Some parents, especially in remote places in the provinces, follow the bad local custom of not allowing their daughters to go to school. These parents, who attach very little value to the education of their daughters, prefer them to stay at home doing housework rather than going to school. Other reasons for parents not allowing their daughters to go to school include other acts of physical and mental violence, such as harassment on the way to and from school and at school, acid attacks, kidnappings, doping and in some cases even killing groups of girl pupils.

Another reason why girls are not allowed to attend school in remote rural and provincial areas is the parents' mentality, which requires them to be imprisoned in terms of access to education. They prefer that, instead of going to school, the girls work in the home and help their mother.

The majority of Afghan parents are indifferent to girl's cultural aspects and in many cases opposed to their being educated. These conservative parents are of the opinion that official education in school has a perverse effect on our girls' morals and that this perversion is poisoning our society, because girls and women are the sources of family veneration and standing. In the provinces, with official education, sons are taught to develop themselves within society. For generations of peasants, the old objective is maintained whereby girls have to be wives and mothers and boys help the family, so they are kept from education.

Forced child marriage is another social problem impeding girls' education. Women and girls can continue learning so long as they are under the family's

responsibility, increasing their knowledge day by day, but when they marry, they take on many responsibilities in the home and abandon their studies.

In 2003 the UNICEF office working on education said that girls' education in Afghanistan is at a low level and that ways should be sought to resolve and change this situation. In the positive research on education that they conducted with women and men in the whole social group, they conceived and accorded value to an educational route map for girls and boys. With regard to girl's education, one very important finding was that illiterate fathers tend to be opposed to education, they being in many cases the first person with the power to decide whether to allow girls to go to school, without any clear reason being given for the objection.

Other causes of illiteracy, which affects nearly 90% of Afghan women, are poverty and the lack of jobs, the long war and its consequences, all of which increase enmity and hatred. These were also reasons for marrying their daughters prematurely, in order to obtain large sums of money, "*toyana*" or *dowry*, as well as matchmaking. These defenceless, innocent girls are also handed over in compensation for criminal acts (killing, rape and reputation) of their parents, brothers, uncles and cousins.

As part of the situation we refer to, according to world medical research, 75% of forced marriages in Afghanistan involve girls under 15, representing another reason for dropping out of school.

The data illustrates something else: that within families there are many reasons for girls not going to school, and that the possibilities, facilities and services provided by the government are also inadequate. All in all, the lack of effort, use of energy and inequality between boys and girls at school and the great distances between school and home are other reasons which stand in the way of girls' receiving education.

The shortage of female teachers, only 28% in 2005, has improved, according to the latest information from the Afghan Ministry of Education. In 2012, 38% of the 190,000 qualified teachers were female. The total number of schools is 14,100, of which 50% are usable. Ten years ago there were just 3,400 schools with 2,000 teachers, and a million pupils had access to education.

■ Conclusions of the research

- *The lack of security and its effects on women's education*

During the 1970s, schools had become an ideological battlefield between the forces of the previous government and the Islamic organisations. After the

1978 coup d'état, the first thing to be sacrificed was the education system. It had been started by the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA) which, from the outset, had placed great importance on schools and adult education programmes and had increased the number of girls receiving schooling. The government used the education system, and wanted to consolidate its situation, to which end it sent more than 50,000 people to the USSR to be educated (country evaluation report, *UNTA 1978*, page 24). There was a serious reaction to prevent it, leading to resistance against the government. Most things relating to education were attacked, and they broke with the Mujahideen. Both the PDPA and later the Mujahideen used the education system for their own ends.

The quality of education deteriorated sharply, and in remote areas there was much suffering, with many female teachers being killed and schools destroyed. Once again, in 1983 the Ministry of Foreign Affairs announced to the United Nations that 50% of Afghanistan's schools had been destroyed.

In 2003 the Asian Development Bank (ADB) confirmed that 80% of all schools had been damaged or completely destroyed and, according to information of the Presidency for Security and the Ministry of Education, in 2009, 481 schools in various provinces of Afghanistan had been burnt down and closed by the insurgents. In conclusion, 300,000 pupils have been deprived of education. Governments and political groups have used centres of education and schools, particularly girls schools, for their political ends and ideological posturing.

The years of war have had many negative and unpleasant effects on the education system. In 1935 primary education was official, compulsory and free. The constitution of 1964 guaranteed education, but it took many years to spread throughout the country. In 1975, many years before the war, only 11.4% of the Afghan population age six and over were literate, and men were much better educated than women. In the central areas 14.8% of men were literate, while among women in the provinces the figure was less than 0.6%.

The lack of security over so many years is a serious obstacle which, until now, has blighted the education system and the lives of Afghan women and girls. Security problems always originate and spread from the borders of Afghanistan, crucial positions for organisations seeking to establish security and combat criminals and terrorists from Al Qaeda, with the help of the United Nations forces, in order to achieve a stable Afghanistan. The security of the country's domestic and international airports is another primary necessity.

Keeping the entry and exit points open, and the most populated provinces - Kabul, Nengarhar, Kandahar, Herat, Mazar and Sharif - is also essential for security.

The elimination of drugs is another important issue that would help the image of security.

Keeping the country's secret documents from irresponsible persons and other intelligence networks is another priority, and one of the main tasks of the armed forces and security organisations. Priority characteristics for the development of military personnel are first class education, being equipped with modern weapons and adherence to rules. But regrettably, our armed forces are poor in all respects and have no access to any of these things.

The lack of security is an important factor directly or indirectly influencing girls' lack of access to schooling. This research reveals the lack of security not as an isolated variant, but as a factor influencing all other factors and upsetting the education system.

Although people have a generally positive attitude to girls' education, it is a controversial topic.

In late 2002 there were written reports of girls' schools being attacked and set on fire in some provinces. These attacks were intended to frighten girls in order to deter them from going to school. It was like the 1950s, when extremists rose up against girls' education.

In Kandahar acid was also thrown in schoolgirls' faces. This reaction was against schoolgirls who did not cover their faces and wore short skirts in Kabul, as in the 1970s.

In any case, these are not new developments, but situations that have been repeated over the course of many years; levels of insecurity and violence in society are very high. If this process were to continue and be accepted, pupils' families would not encourage their children to go to school in remote areas.

Research into human rights in the country indicates that worry about lack of security is one of the factors impeding girls' access to school and education. There are also many families who would like their daughters to continue their studies, but who need the means to protect their girls and ensure their safety on the way to and from school.

- *The lack of adequate access to schooling for girls*

Since the fall of the Taliban regime there has been an increase in the proportion of girls in school, but nearly half of them still do not attend school. There are many differences - regional, urban and tribal.

Another factor impeding girls' education is the lack of special schools for them; the lack of female teachers and the persistence of social and cultural factors which also have an effect on continuing one's studies. Enormous damage is caused by insurgents who regard schools as targets, and believe that culture and education are unnecessary and harmful to girls. In Afghanistan there are many obstacles and, depending on the particular places and attacks, in some areas women live in great fear, while in other places this is not the case.

However, in some areas there are cultural impediments to the free movement of women, as a result of which absenteeism increases. Another cultural problem is that if the teachers are not women, families will not allow their daughters to attend school. In many places in Afghanistan, girls' schools are separated from boys' schools. Only 12.3% of schools are girls' schools. There are also significant geographical differences, with 30% of schools located in Kabul. In some provinces there are no girl's high schools at all. Until 2007 Wardak, which is one of the country's central provinces, had no high school for girls. That year Turkish NATO forces built two schools. One year later in 2008, in the face of incessant threats from the Taliban, and despite the fact that the principal of one of the schools was a man, they closed.

The great distances involved is another major problem preventing girls from going to school. While 29% of peasant parents refuse to send their daughters to school because of the distances involved, 24% do so because the girls' schools are not separate from the boys'. To this must be added the lack of transport and poor facilities such as a lack of bathrooms, water etc.

The Asian Development Bank reported that nearly half of all schools have no running water and fewer than 15% have bathrooms for the children.

In the offices of Pamplarena, supported by Sweden, and those of Nejab, which is international, the model chosen by village women (especially a group of teachers of very young girls) was for ninth graders to teach the younger girls, supported by the female teachers. This type of female education enabled 48% of girls to go to school, since the teachers were women, in places such as Paktika, Paktia, Logar, Wardak and Ghazni provinces.

As shown in Table 6-5, of the total number of people interviewed, 111, representing 22.2%, said the lack of access to schools was a reason for the lack of education, although they would like to attend school.

According to the information in this table we see that the economic and social situation of Afghanistan is one of the reasons the percentage of boys in school is higher than that of girls. While it is very difficult for parents to accept that their daughters should travel long distances to school, on the other hand their financial situation does not allow them to use any other means.

According to the Human Rights Commission and others, of the 311 girls interviewed, 160 had no access to education because of the distance of the school or family customs.

Also, according to this Commission, in six of the eight central Afghan provinces researched, girls wanting to go to school and continue their studies have to spend between one and six hours a day getting there and back.

Pupils' sexual and psychological problems form the only essential subject for the Afghan family. Sometimes when girls are walking along they are harassed by men and boys, which is another reason for families not to let them go, and also the girls themselves are sometimes blamed for these attacks. In families that live close to the school, a male member of the family, generally an old man, usually accompanies them.

- *Weak family financial situation*

A family's financial dependence on men means that, since they can help the family in the future, great value is attributed to them, whereas girls, who cannot contribute financially, are considered inferior and are deprived of essential rights such as affection and education.

Without their sons' salaries most families are unable to meet the day-to-day costs of school, such as school uniform, books and other things, and have to ask for the cost of transport to be reimbursed. Some peasant families, because of their poor financial situation, are unable to buy the *chadori (burka)* for their girls who go to school; for in some places young girls must wear a *burka* and without it, their going out is a problem and a great source of shame that directly damages the family's honour. If these naïve, defenceless children wish to escape from this prison (*burka*) and be free, they lose the chance of an education.

Relatively speaking, the education of girl's education is increasing. In the final years of the past decade the attention of both families and government has been won. Previously there were many impediments to girls' and women's education; skill and aptitude for housework was the main purposes of their training. Over the past few years, education has had a positive effect on household economies and has also involved an exchange of ideas in the family and increased positive perceptions of women's education.

In the past, the father was the only breadwinner and the only person to spend money; the others simply ate. Today's social necessities have led to the whole family having to work and find sources of income. When women and girls are active and have knowledge, they are able to help their families, so it is

to be hoped that the situation will improve and women will engage in social, economic and cultural activities and occupy the place and position in life that corresponds to them.

The large sums of money that are paid as dowries is growing and leading to an increase in girls marrying prematurely. Because of the socio-economic situation in Afghanistan, in 2009 23% of boys and 10% of girls were unable to receive education because they were working.

The weak financial situation of Afghan families and the many difficulties in maintaining a subsistence livelihood are further reasons for girls being treated differently and for the unfavourable situation for educating their sons and daughters. Sons have greater value to families, as it is they who will support their parents. According to the results of the research carried out by the Women's and Children's Rights Research Office, in 2009, more than 10.3% of families, because of poverty, did not allow their girls to go to school. Poverty also prevented 10% of girls with various illnesses from being attended to by a doctor.

The information therefore makes it clear that poverty is a problem that exacerbates the harshness of family life, especially with regard to girls. According to the research on women and children, 46.3% of girls who leave home do so because of poverty, and also in the cases of child marriage, 4.2% complain of their families' poor financial situation.

According to our research, a total of 90 women, representing 18% of those we interviewed, said the basic obstacle to and cause of the lack of access to education for women and girls was the weakness of the family's financial situation.

- *New Ministry of Education of Afghanistan strategic planning*

Education and training are the main forces in achieving progress and prosperity for the whole society and country. If a society's education system or knowledge is properly and systematically established and children in the society are supported by specific systems and scientific and educational principles in acquiring the basic means of training and learning, this will form the country's basis for making individuals useful to society in the future.

The world's advanced countries attach great importance to education and training systems, and take care to ensure that the most appropriate scientific methods in the field are used, that they are appropriate to the time and that extensive research is carried out in this regard to obtain the best methods, which are periodically renewed. Afghanistan is one of the countries in which

training and education show such low levels, for obvious reasons such as the long years of war and the damage this did to progress.

Of course the efforts made by government and private institutions in recent years to rebuild the educational system and promote the level of science in the country have been very honourable and there are hopes that they will increasingly cover more ground.

In recent years, the Afghan Ministry of Education has made an effort to promote the creation of a national education strategy, in parallel with a Strategic Plan for the Development of Education in Afghanistan organised from 1385 to 1389 (2006 - 2010) and from 1389 to 1393 (2010-2014)⁽¹⁾.

The Minister of Education, Doctor Farooq Wardak, has stated that the National Strategic Plan for the years 1389 to 1393 (2010-2014) represents a unified, global approach to facing the challenges of education in Afghanistan, where the challenges must be dealt with appropriately in order to achieve the educational objectives based on the Afghan constitution, in the National Development Strategy for Afghanistan and in the specific development objectives for the year 1399 (2020).

The Strategic Plan identifies the main objectives for education and, to increase equal access to quality education, has designed an integrated programme by means of a process of participation in and consultation on the plan with Afghan citizens at all levels, through education, training and the establishment of development paths.

The Ministry of Education has committed itself to providing all children and adults with a quality appropriate to their needs in all areas of education. It has also declared a commitment to the development of the government's education programmes by means of transparent and responsible financial systems. The systems for monitoring and assessment need to be strengthened at the highest levels and created through firm relations with people, civil society, the private sector and the government.

The policies and five-year strategies are included in the Strategic Education Plan from 1389 to 1393 (2010-2014). These policies and objectives, designed for the educational system, are based on the national and international commitments of the government of Afghanistan. The basis for this plan was developed between 1385 to 1389 (2006 - 2010), and the hopes and desires of the Afghan people and of the students should be met through the results of the implementation of the Strategic Plan.

⁽¹⁾ Editor's note: Afghanistan, like Iran, uses the *Persian calendar*. It is a solar calendar with six months of 31 days each, followed by five months each with 30 days and the last month with 29 or 30 days depending on whether the year is a leap year.

The plan includes five programmes for improving access to quality education and improving how it is managed nationwide. They reflect the most pressing needs, among them:

1. The first priority is to improve access to education for students, by refurbishing the buildings and classrooms; school must provide an appropriate space for children, especially for girls' education. At present, nearly half of all existing school buildings are highly deficient, damaged and unsuitable for use.
2. The second priority is to increase teachers' skills and teaching methods in order to improve the quality of students' education and learning.
3. The third priority relates to the Ministry itself, which is not structured to promote the development and application of appropriate policies, effective management of human resources and financial and physical requirements to attain the desired results. In 1389 (2010), Gul Agha Ahmadi, press adviser to the Ministry of Education of Afghanistan, expressed his satisfaction with the Ministry's progress and the fact that many of these priorities have been achieved in Afghanistan.

"Mr. President: In the past year, the Education Plan has moved forward in accordance with each of our five programmes. In the education plan for our national development plan for education, in four programmes we have 7.6 million students, 38% of them girls. And of the 550,000 adults wishing to study, 60% are women. Out of a total of 179,000 teachers, 30% are women. 20,000 literacy courses are being given in teacher training centres and in the approximately 13,200 schools. We must of course remember that only half of these institutions are in good condition for studying and in them the students can follow different subjects in accordance with the national studies plan, as well as Islam and its principles and values and love of the Homeland. The Ministry of Education of Afghanistan is also considering the objectives with a view to achieving its strategic plan for the education and training system, in order to develop long-term goals to 1399 (2020).

"Based on this goal, to 1399 (2020), gross rates of schooling at basic level will increase by 104% for boys and 103% for girls. Net registration rates for boys and girls will increase by 98%. The number of students in Islamic education will increase to 180,000, with 95% of teachers sitting an examination. The literacy rate in this country will reach 50%, and 12% of high school graduates will continue their technical and professional training".

In this regard, Gul Agha Ahmadi, the Ministry's press adviser, said "activities to achieve this goal in 1389 (2010) will be gradually increased and, in some programmes, we are well ahead of plan".

"Mr. President: Little by little, the Ministry of Education is striving to advance; within a timeframe of ten years. From 1399 (2020), all children of school age will be able to choose their schools in Afghanistan and we will have services for them. Gradually we will implement these plans, the plans we made, our plans. In certain respects we are actually ahead of our plan and, Allah be praised, the millennium objectives will be achieved throughout the world, and in Afghanistan too. Under the plan, by 1399 (2020) no Afghan child of school age will be deprived of the opportunity to attend school. The Strategic Education Plan is for all children of school age, without discrimination, and balanced throughout the country, and it will provide access to quality education, enabling children to acquire the necessary skills for living a healthy and successful life together with the family and the community and to go on to higher education."

However, the scales of education services for boys and girls in Afghanistan are not balanced, especially in remote areas where the most traditional communities show least interest. Doctor Sima Samar, of the Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission, says that the government is obliged to provide education to girls throughout the country because the country's progress depends on the promotion and advancement of women and girls.

Although the Education Secretariat's civil servants have made progress in various sectors, such as girls' education, nevertheless some Afghan experts believe that the government's duties regarding Afghan women in various sectors such as education have not been fulfilled.

Women's rights activist Najla Ayubi said:

"I am sure that in the furthest corners of Afghanistan, the conclusion regarding Afghan women's health problems has been reached that unfortunately there is no attention paid by the Afghan government to providing healthcare to girls of school age who do not attend school in accordance with the Afghan constitution, and the government knows that these women have the right to receive education and training, specifically focusing on this issue, and regrettably, we see that 79% of Afghan women are illiterate."

Doctor Sima Samar affirms that the right to access to daughter's education, together with other rights such as the right to life, cannot be replaced by any other.

By 1393 (2014) the number of students in school needs to increase to 10 million with access areas provided for nomad children and children with special needs, to improve education. In 1381 (2002) the number of children in school stood

at 2.3 million whereas now, according to civil servants at the ministry, there are more than 7.6 million. To date, 4,690 new schools have been set up with special attention given to the various provincial and rural areas as well as to the city. At public schools the drop-out rate is 3% and those repeating the school year are fewer than 11%.

All students should be provided with an appropriate environment for learning at public schools in order to facilitate mental and physical development.

The participation of parents and local school governors and management, with the setting up and training of the whole school council, is essential for the strengthening of public education. By 1393 (2014), the public education system aims to have strengthened school management and public education through the work of trained observers. The Strategic Plan is based on the Islamic system of education for training the workforce required for education, promotion, leadership, service in government institutions and the development and improvement of non-governmental and private education institutions and institutes of higher learning.

One of the fundamental needs of education, in all community development action taken to improve the quality of teacher training or change the teachers in the normal schools, is for them to be trained and familiarised with modern methods required by education services in order to teach and work in accordance with the community's needs. Teacher training centres are designed to develop teachers' skills, improving the quality of education and students' educational progress in public and religious schools in accordance with the objectives of the Strategic Plan.

Under this plan for teachers, 12th-grade graduates and trainee support teachers in normal schools and other centres, before receiving the full training, they go to remote areas as support teachers to improve their academic abilities through practice.

Based on the Plan, by 1393 (2014) more than 60,000 members of the academic branch will move up to grade 14, improving their teaching skills and knowledge. 50,000 12th grade teachers will be recruited and trained in districts with qualified teachers.

Textbooks and new educational material will be provided to students and teachers, to offer high-quality education on the spot, to improve the quality of education and learning and ensure ongoing improvement in students' results in the short and long term.

To improve teachers' skills and abilities in order to move education forward, as well as to improve students' results and the capacity of the teacher and

administrative staff knowledge update system, a normal school and the teacher training department will also be created.

Gul Agha Ahmadi explained it thus: "Of the 190,000 teachers in our education system, only 30% have been professionally trained." To resolve this problem, the Ministry of Education has established 41 teacher training centres and 87 district training centres. Nearly 50,000 students are now studying to become teachers in the new system and salaries have been introduced for 102,000 teachers with plans to do so for a further 128,000.

To improve the lives of teachers, last year about thirty thousand plots of land were distributed in various provinces of Afghanistan. Of these, 8,000 were distributed in 1388 (2009). Literacy has been opened up to adults and for those who, for whatever reason, have not received basic training in normal schools. The promotion of education, science and culture is very important throughout society.

The Ministry also plans to provide literacy, knowledge and skills services to people aged 15 and over in order to improve their chances of playing an active role in the community. Under the Strategic Education Plan for 2015, the Ministry also plans for at least 3.6 million to become literate.

Given that a large proportion of the pupils live in rural areas, the Afghan Ministry of Education has announced that special attention has been given to these areas and they will endeavour to encourage participation by the private sector, local populations and other institutions, including mosques and clerics, to attract more students.

Given that the literacy rate among women is very low, in order to increase their participation in the literacy programmes there will be more public awareness programmes and the number of women teachers in the literacy programmes will be increased.

The Ministry plans to offer other incentives, such as food, health services and farm seed subsidies to assist in ensuring women's participation in literacy programmes.

Gul Agha Ahmadi mentioned as significant the fact that 20,000 new literacy courses were given in 2010, also speaking of the participation of women in the literacy programmes.

In 1389 (2010) the Education Department created 20 new literacy courses. We have approximately 550,000 Afghans who had not attended literacy courses and who were fortunate enough to have this opportunity, 60% of whom were women.

■ CONCLUSION

Afghan society has certainly undergone many changes in fortune, always within a context of the imbalance that exists between social expectations and failure to fulfil demands and needs.

Researchers are always keen to study these factors, and strive to find ways to resolve them. Many of the situations we have seen over past decades still continue today. The growth and consolidation of the roots of this tree in its rapid development present great difficulties and, due to the fruitless wars and conflicts between power groups and historical values in political life of the cultural and economic infrastructure of Afghanistan, the structures of civil society have collapsed.

Crystallisation and expression from foreign sources –in December 1979 the Soviet Army invaded the country: the involvement of neighbouring Soviet republics– and the influence of extremist groups working for their own benefit and disparaging education gradually led to ignorance of the rule of law and the sense of injustice in Afghanistan.

Foreign intervention in Afghanistan during the last decades of the twentieth century, together with complex problems. brought this country close to complete destruction, the abyss. Political parties such as the *Khalq*, the *Parchan* and the Mujahideen were supported by various foreign countries in their struggle to attain power. These wars had terrible consequences for women.

Our country's society is for men. Women live in very bad conditions and have to flee their homes; they are burnt or hanged and have to fight hard for their rights. They are the victims of crimes committed by these men who call themselves Muslims but who are not, and the commanders and members of the Mujahideen, Taliban and mafias who buy and sell women both among Afghans and to and from people from other countries.

The women in our country, which is still dominated by the old system of serfdom and violent, merciless tribal culture and reactionary patriarchal tyranny opposed to even the slightest benefits of civilisation, are denied the most basic freedoms and human and social rights. At all times and everywhere, human rights violations and discrimination against women and girls in Afghanistan have been intense and inhumane. Above all, it is still misogyny that determines disaster in Afghanistan, which is not comparable with many other Muslim societies, for example: female prostitution, forced marriage, forced marriage of widows and child marriage and depriving our country's women and girls of their education and human rights.

Yet in spite of the absolute tyranny of this vengeful patriarchy, women are important in our homeland. They curse, run away from home, burn their bodies and even go so far as to kill themselves in their struggle for the right to stand up to the inhumane acts of patriarchy.

Throughout the current crisis and the war in our country, for more than twenty-five years now, Afghan women have fought alongside their men in the struggle for liberal social rights, their independence and the national pride of Afghanistan. They have drunk from the martyr's cup and defended themselves bravely. They have also suffered the loss of family members and loved ones and a substantial part of their homes and belongings, and some have been displaced or captured at gunpoint by brutal warlords. Many married women and younger women, in violation of the good traditions of national and international official standards, have been abducted at gunpoint to be sold as slaves in the region, and especially in Arab countries. Upon the return of Afghanistan's political parties, in the name of Islam and in order to get money from abroad, they obeyed foreign politicians from neighbouring countries and further afield. They also sought to increase their powers, both those of the party and their own personal power, in various places by means of slaughter, pillage and the brutal rape of women.

In the past few years the proportion of women in political, social, economic and cultural activities in the capital and in the provinces has increased. This is the reality: Afghan women who had lost their identity are regaining it once again. Although the Ministry of Women's Affairs, women's rights research institutions and cultural and economic services are working to safeguard women's rights with the help of the international community, in some places, outside Kabul and a few other provincial capitals, the lives of women and girls are in a deplorable situation.

Negative factors still persist, such as maternal and infant mortality due to the lack of access to health centres, the existence of poverty and hunger, migration, forced marriage and submission to every kind of violence carried out by the family and the community, the lack of access to training centres in schools and universities, local customs and tradition and the lack of facilities in this field, as well as dozens of other cases in which the lives of Afghan women and girls face the dangers inherent in an adverse security situation.

One of our important conclusions shows that the adverse security situation and the exclusion that girls and women have suffered in other areas have also affected them and put them at a disadvantage. Various studies have shown that, among factors causing lack of access to school and education for girls and women, are a number of social factors that have a negative effect, notably: the lack of security, exacerbated by the distances involved and the lack of

means of transport, the scarcity of female teachers and the lack of drinking water and adequate healthcare. All these factors, plus forced marriages, make it impossible for girls and women to continue their schooling and education. Security, or the lack thereof, is the most important factor, because the enemies are now focusing their destructive activities on burning down girls' schools, since they are opposed to their being educated. Meanwhile the assistance of the international community of more than forty countries in promoting human rights - especially women's and children's rights - and reconstructing Afghanistan, the fight against terrorism and Al Qaeda and the production and cultivation of drugs through financial, technical and military assistance to the Afghan people, shows the human face of the situation.