



Afghanistan

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(This country profile is available online at www.unisa.edu.au/genderbudgets)

1 Background

Socio-economic indicators	
Population in 2008	32.7 million
Projected population change 2008–50	150%
GDP per capita (PPP \$US) 2005	Not available
Proportion (percent) of population below the Poverty Line (\$1 PPP a day) 2005	Not available
Gender equality indicators	
Seats in parliament held by women (% of total) 2007	Not available
Maternal mortality ratio (per 100,000 live births) 2005	Not available
Adult literacy rate, female (aged 15 and older) 2005	Not available
Adult literacy rate, male (aged 15 and older) 2005	Not available
Gross secondary enrolment: Ratio of female rate to male rate 2005	Not available
Gross secondary enrolment: Female ratio (% of the female secondary school aged population) 2005	Not available
Share of women in wage employment in the non-agricultural sector (% of total employment in the sector) 2000	Not available
Budgetary indicators	
General Government public expenditure on education (% of GDP) 2002–05	Not available
General Government public expenditure on education (% of total expenditure) 2002-05	Not available
General Government public expenditure on health (% of GDP) 2004	Not available
General Government public expenditure on health (% of total government expenditure) 2005	3.3%
Central Government military expenditure (% of GDP) 2005	Not available
Central Government public expenditure on defence (% of total outlays) 2007	Not available
Open Budget Index: Overall Score	8% - Government provides the public with scarce information on the central government's budget and financial activities during the course of the budget year.

Sources: UNDP (2007) *Human Development Report 2007/08*; Population Reference Bureau, (2008) *World Population Data Sheet*; World Economic Forum (2007) *The Global Gender Gap Report*; UN Statistics Division (2008) *Millennium Development Goal Indicators*; United Nations Population Division (2008) *World Population Prospects*; UNESCAP (2008) *Statistical Yearbook for Asia and the Pacific*; IMF (2008) *Government Finance Statistics*; Open Budget Initiative (2008) (See Explanatory Notes for details)

Afghanistan is located in Central Asia. It is bordered by Iran in the south and west, Pakistan in the south and east, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan in the north, and China in the far northeast. Afghanistan's population is 32.7 million. The main ethnic groups are Pashtun 42% and Tajik 27%. The rest of the population is made up of Hazara, Uzbek, Aimak, Turkmen and Baloch (Government of the United States Library of Congress, 2007).

According to the United Kingdom's Foreign and Commonwealth Office, the foundation of modern Afghanistan is attributed to Ahmad Shah Abdali (1747-72). The struggle between the British and Russians for control over Central Asia resulted in three British Afghan Wars between 1839 and 1919. After the Second World War (in which Afghanistan remained neutral), a liberal government came to power. In 1978 Prime Minister Daud was overthrown by the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan, who tried to establish a socialist state. This led to armed resistance by conservative Islamic elements, and in 1979 the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan.

2 Afghanistan

Soviet intervention lasted ten years and sparked a civil war with anti-Soviet mujahideen forces. With the departure of Soviet troops in 1989 the conflict continued as mujahideen groups struggled for control. By 1994 the Pashtun Taliban began to emerge as the dominant power in Afghanistan and established an Islamic state (US Library of Congress 2007).

After the terrorist attacks on the US on 11 September 2001 the Taliban came under immense international military pressure for their refusal to give up Osama bin Laden. In November 2001, the United Nations brought together Afghan factions opposed to the Taliban in Bonn, Germany, to establish a political process to restore stability and governance in Afghanistan. The Afghan Interim Authority was formed and was chaired by Hamid Karzai.

Afghanistan's new constitution was adopted in January 2004 and Hamid Karzai was elected as the country's president in October 2004 in the first nationwide presidential election. The new constitution restructured the government as an Islamic republic consisting of three branches, (executive, legislature and judiciary) (US Library of Congress 2007).

However, the conflict in Afghanistan continues as the Taliban continue to clash with Afghan and international military forces especially in the southern provinces (US Library of Congress, 2007). The allegations of fraud surrounding the August 2009 elections have contributed further to the country's political instability.

There is little data available on development indicators for Afghanistan (see table above). It is understood to be one of the world's poorest countries after many years of war and political instability and is now dependent on foreign aid. Afghanistan is a rural subsistence economy but it has large untapped supplies of oil and minerals. It also has a large hidden economy in the trafficking of drugs and guns.

2 Gender-responsive budgeting

International agencies and foreign governments have played a prominent role in seeking to lay the groundwork for gender responsive budgeting (GRB) in Afghanistan. In an assessment of gender responsive budgeting in Afghanistan a representative from the donor community argued that there is now an enabling policy framework, growing political commitment, advocacy capacity and operational institutional mechanisms (email correspondence with donor 16/03/2009). However, it is clear that the progress that has been achieved has largely been the result of donor initiatives.

GRB initiatives have sought to build on supportive aspects within the Afghanistan Constitution, the 2008–2013 Afghanistan National Development Strategy (ANDS) and the National Action Plan for Women of Afghanistan (Afghanistan Ministry of Finance 2009: 39). The five-year national development policy document, ANDS, incorporates gender as a cross-cutting issue. Specifically, ANDS entails a framework outlining the Gender Equity Cross Cutting Strategy which includes critical measures of gender equality and targets three main outcomes: (i) expanding the number of departments engaged in gender mainstreaming, including increasing GRB work and qualified staff; (ii) improving the status of women; and (iii) enhancing the understanding and acceptance of gender equality in the community and in organisations (ANDS Oversight Committee 2007: 150-152).

Gender responsive budgeting work in Afghanistan can be traced to 2005 under the leadership of the Inter-Ministerial Working Group on Gender Mainstreaming when technical assistance was provided, largely by the German Federal government's Deutsche Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit (GTZ) GmbH, to the Afghan government and the Parliament. This led to the establishment of the Gender Budgeting Working Group within the Ministry of Finance (Kohistani 2007: 3). The technical assistance project entailed an inter-ministerial training workshop on GRB in 2005, followed by a series of training, mentoring and coaching activities

from 2005 to 2007. These included a gender responsive budgeting planning workshop for sector managers in the Ministry of Finance and a briefing on gender budgeting to the Parliamentary Budget Committee. Supporting the GRB work was a gender budgeting vision drafted by the heads of the Budget Office of the Ministry of Finance (Kohistani 2007).

In 2007 the key ministries undertook a mission to India to study the practices of financial management, GRB and gender mainstreaming (email correspondence with donor 16/03/2009). In that same year the Afghanistan Ministry of Finance, with donor assistance, established a Gender Budgeting Unit (GBU) with the purpose of contributing to the gender analysis and review of government policies, programs and budgets by ensuring that these reflect the government's commitment to gender equality (Afghanistan Ministry of Finance 2007). The Deputy Minister of Finance stated that: 'It is vital to institutionalise mechanisms to monitor and account for the impact of government spending on men and women' (Afghanistan Ministry of Finance 2007: 1). The location of the GBU within the Ministry of Finance however has meant that while it is responsible for mainstreaming gender in budget policies and processes that affect the entire government, in practice its interventions have been limited only to the Ministry of Finance. Also, while the Unit officials are skilled on budget issues, they were less familiar with gender analysis and with advocacy for change (email correspondence with donor 16/03/2009).

The 2008 Budget Circular required the ministries to integrate gender in the budget process. It included a heading for Gender Percentage in Development Projects with two columns for percentages of males and females. A representative from the donor community has suggested that this approach was not supported by clear instructions on the criteria for sex-disaggregation and consequently most departments failed to submit data. Those that provided information opted to guess on the number of beneficiaries or staff engaged in their initiatives. In response, the UNDP and German government agency, GTZ, have supported the Ministry of Finance to undertake the initial gender analysis and revision of the ministries' budget proposal submissions for the first budget call for 2009 (email correspondence with donor 16/03/2009). The first 2009 Budget Call Circular required ministries to identify the gender impact of budget measures, including indicators, and to ensure consistency with the government's gender equality commitments as outlined in National Action Plan for Women of Afghanistan and the ANDS (Afghanistan Ministry of Finance 2008). The 2009 national budget document claims that gender responsive budgeting has been institutionalised through the establishment of the gender budget unit in the Ministry of Finance and gender units in more than ten ministries. This was qualified by a recognition that these mechanisms 'need more resources and support for their expansion and capacity development' (Afghanistan Ministry of Finance 2009: 39).

In February 2009 the UNDP Colombo Regional Gender Coordinator conducted a series of workshops aimed at raising awareness on gender equality in key ministries and to boost support from relevant stakeholders for increased budgets on gender equality and advocacy on women's issues. These workshops covered a range of topics and involved several Ministries, Parliament and civil society. One workshop focused on fostering collaboration among ministries with a mandate to monitor and support GRB and discuss their specific role in gender mainstreaming (email correspondence with a donor 16/03/2009; UNDP 2009b).

Civil society has only recently become engaged in GRB work in Afghanistan. Donors, particularly UNIFEM and UNDP, have assisted civil society organisations and government departments to devise a GRB consultative and monitoring mechanism. Technical assistance has been provided to strengthen the capacity of the Parliamentary Budget Offices and parliamentarians, including members of the Meshrano Jirga (Upper House) Budget and Finance Commission, in a partnership with UNIFEM and USAID (email correspondence with a donor 16/03/2009).

In reality, while donor support has helped to raise the profile of, and interest in, GRB in government and in parliament, it has been problematic at times given the difficulty of translating practices from other diverse countries to the national context of Afghanistan. It has also been observed that the capacity to influence the process and the decisions on resource allocations is limited and that GRB work has essentially been focused at the central level of government (email correspondence with donor 16/03/2009).

Further constraints on implementing GRB have been identified by UN agencies. These include the lack of sex-disaggregated data; the limited amount of gender detailed studies and analysis; poor understanding on GRB; and limited support from male members of parliament (email correspondence with donor 16/03/2009). The 2008 manual, *Gender Budgeting in Afghanistan*, supported by UNIFEM, summarises the obstacles to further progress. These included the limited representation of women in decision-making, the lack of specific measures to address the particular conditions faced by women and limited priority attributed to social sectors in the budget. At the time of writing, support is being provided by international agencies, including UNDP, to produce a comprehensive gender analysis of national, ministerial and provincial budgets (email correspondence with donor 06/01/2009).

The efforts to progress GRB have grown in parallel with initiatives to improve the public finance management system. The World Bank (2005: 15) summarises the challenges involved as follows:

Afghanistan has an unusual fiscal structure reflecting its historical legacy (e.g. traditionally low revenue mobilization), the long period of conflict (e.g. civil service wages greatly eroded by hyperinflation and severely compressed by fixed allowances), and current reconstruction activities (very high spending) and priorities (e.g. massive expenditures on security).

With donor assistance, the government has devised a standard budget calendar and weekly monitoring and reporting systems and has established consultative and working groups around priorities (UNDP 2009a). In 2005, the first three-year Medium-Term Fiscal Framework (MTFF) for the national budget process was approved as a tool to translate the national development plan priorities in the yearly budgeting cycle (ANDS Oversight Committee 2007: 173; Afghanistan Ministry of Finance 2009). Nevertheless significant governance problems remain with Afghanistan being among the worst-off in terms of rule of law, regulatory quality and control of corruption (World Bank 2005: 60).

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