

Driving Change: Equipped to Fight for an Equal Future

Almost half of Afghanistan's population is female. Still, women are significantly underrepresented in all walks of life. Over the past decade there have been continued efforts by both governmental and non-governmental institutions to raise awareness for women's rights in Afghanistan, to increase gender equality and to strengthen women's position in society.

International Women's Day promotes a sustainable future for all women. A future that is free from stigma and violence and that ensures equal opportunity for all.

This year's theme, *Women in leadership: Achieving an equal future in a COVID-19 world*, celebrates the tremendous efforts that women take on in battling the pandemic and its challenges.

The situation for women in Afghanistan has gradually improved over the past 15 years. Women's right to equality is now enshrined within the Afghan constitution. The Afghan Ministry of Women's Affairs (MoWA) has prioritised the empowerment of women in Afghan society. There are more and more women in leadership positions in the Afghan parliament.

Still, many women are exposed to violence and struggle to access education and healthcare.

The most important rights for the female are the right to education and the right to work.



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The global pandemic has had negative effects on gender equality worldwide. The impacts of crises are never gender neutral, and COVID-19 is no exception.

A [recent study](#) by UN Women and the International Rescue Committee (IRC) indicates that women in Afghanistan face increased risk due to COVID-19 and are more likely to be negatively affected by the pandemic.

For Afghan women, the pandemic means further restrictions on freedoms. Women are reported to experience higher levels of stress. Women are more likely to lose their economic livelihoods. They often struggle with additional caregiving duties, such as caring for an elderly or sick relative.

These restrictions add to the already heavy burden of twenty years of war, which have drastically affected the lives and fate of women.

Meanwhile, reports on violence against women have increased. Lockdowns often force women to stay in close quarters with their abusers.

Even before the pandemic, many women found it difficult to access information on their rights or were struggling to find support. The most recent [Survey of the Afghan People](#) by the Asia Foundation found that 59 % of female-headed households do not own a registered sim-card and that 73 % do not have any members who can read or write. These circumstances often lead to women's isolation, especially in remote areas.

The difficulties of the COVID-19 pandemic exacerbate these effects.



I wish one day it will come true that there will be no prejudice between men and women, among those who have high social status and contact and those who do not have it. So that inequality will end.

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The Afghan-German Cooperation's programme Promoting the Rule of Law (RoL) works together with the MoWA to overcome women's isolation and to support them in better understanding and claiming their rights.

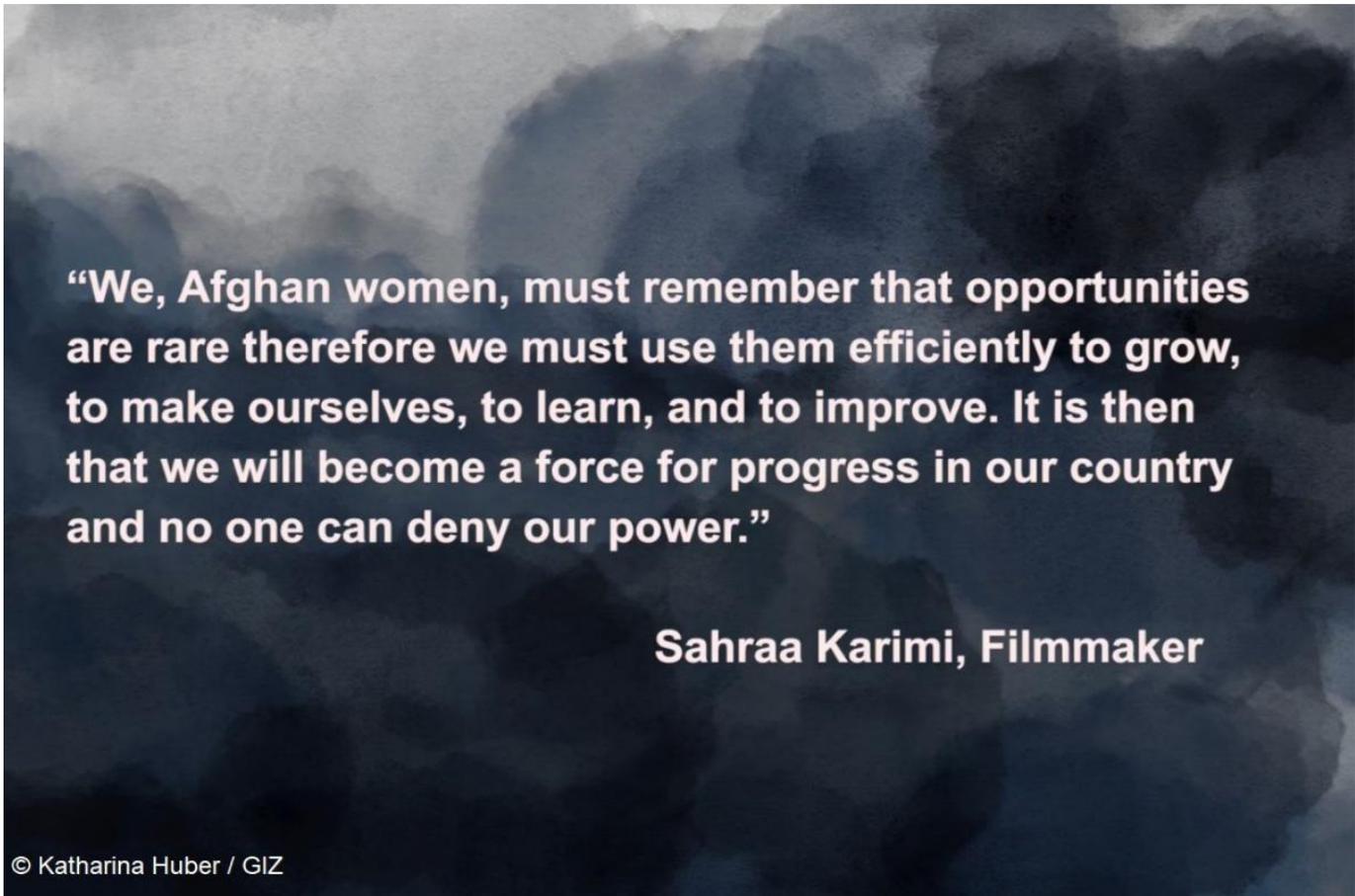
Together, they have set up 119 Volunteer Gender Focal Points in 105 districts in nine provinces. These facilities are staffed with volunteers who offer support to women who want to find out about their legal rights or seek assistance. These focal points provide crucial services for women to connect and share information.

Many women do not have access to legal information or resources. The trained volunteers listen to women's concerns,

educate them on their rights, provide advice and guide them to receive the right support for their matters. This strengthens women's knowledge on their rights and ultimately increases their confidence to call out injustices.

Through these focal points, the MoWA's message on gender equality is delivered widely – even to rural districts. This has been especially important during the COVID-19 pandemic. Basic knowledge on their rights will empower women to handle such situations not only for themselves but also for those in their communities who might find themselves in similar situations.

Education is one of the most important means of equipping women with the knowledge, skills and self-confidence necessary to fully participate and contribute in society. Gender equality is not only a fundamental human right, but a necessary foundation for a peaceful and healthy society.



“We, Afghan women, must remember that opportunities are rare therefore we must use them efficiently to grow, to make ourselves, to learn, and to improve. It is then that we will become a force for progress in our country and no one can deny our power.”

Sahraa Karimi, Filmmaker

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Despite the many challenges they face, Afghan women hold the potential and determination to drive change.

In Afghanistan there is a wealth of women contributing to the country's development, peacebuilding and COVID-19 response efforts. Their equal representation and participation in decision-making will be key for the sustainable development of the country.

Teaser text:

Every year on 8th March, International Women's Day celebrates the social, cultural and political achievements of women and girls. It highlights their rights and raises awareness of their challenges.

Priority area:

Gute Regierungsführung

Province:

Landesweit

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