



# Afghanistan's Future in Transition: A Participatory Assessment Of the Afghan Youth



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This report should be cited using the following reference:

**Samuel Hall Consulting (2013). *"Afghanistan's Future in Transition: A Participatory Assessment of the Afghan Youth"*, research commissioned by DMoYA, UNDP, UNFPA, and UNICEF; Kabul, 2013.**

This publication was prepared with the support of the Deputy Ministry of Youth Affairs of the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan and commissioned by UNDP, UNFPA, and UNICEF. The field research, interviews, and analyses were conducted by *Samuel Hall*. The views and analysis contained in the publication therefore do not represent the views of UNFPA, UNICEF, UNDP or DMoYA.

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## List of Acronyms

ACSF	Afghan Civil Society Forum
AMS	Afghan Mortality Survey
ANDS	Afghanistan National Development Strategy
ANYP	Afghanistan National Youth Policy
ARH	Adolescents Reproductive Health
ASRH	Adolescents Sexual and Reproductive Health
AYCA	Afghan Youth Coordination Agency
CDC	Community Development Councils
CSO	Central Statistics Organization
CSOs	Civil Society Organizations
DDAs	District Development Assemblies
DMoYA	Deputy Ministry of Youth Affairs
DRC	Danish Refugee Council
ESC	Employment Service Centre
GoA	Government of Afghanistan
IDPs	Internally Displaced Persons
ILO	International Labour Organization
MDGs	Millennium Development Goals
MICS	Multiple Indicator Clusters Survey
MoIC	Ministry of Information and Culture
MoE	Ministry of Education
MoHE	Ministry of Higher Education
MoJ	Ministry of Justice
MoLSA	Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs
MoPH	Ministry of Public Health
MoWA	Ministry of Women Affairs
MRRD	Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development
NGOs	Non-governmental Organizations
NRC	Norwegian Refugee Council
NRVA	National Risk and Vulnerability Assessment
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNOCHA	United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
UNODC	United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
WB	The World Bank
WDI	World Development Index

# 1. INTRODUCTION

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Development programmes in Afghanistan have largely ignored the voices of young people. Afghanistan has one of the world's fastest growth rates at 2.8%, and two thirds of the country (63%<sup>1</sup>) is under the age of 24, yet the policies that shape their future are being formulated with little understanding of who the youth are, or what they want. Afghan youths remain largely outside the radar of policy-makers: reconstruction and development have not matched their high expectations and many young people still feel politically disenfranchised.

As a result, there have been calls for a serious debate – to start before 2014 – on how best to boost civilian power in favour of Afghanistan's youth<sup>2</sup>. However, time has now passed for just a debate. A serious account of the Afghan youth is necessary to develop practical and evidence-based policy solutions for engaging with young people and giving them a voice in Afghanistan's future. 2014 – the Transition Year – will see the complete transferral of security responsibility to Afghan security services, and the election of a new President. A combination of political volatility, poor economic performance and Afghanistan's conspicuous youth bulge increases the likelihood of prolonged conflict and instability<sup>3</sup>. As Afghanistan is entering its 'transformational decade', there is a window of opportunity to rethink the dialogue with the Afghan youth, defining a way forward that voices their legitimate concerns and optimises the potential of their generation.

According to global data, of 198 countries worldwide, 50% currently have a youth policy. A further 28% are revising their existing national youth policy or are, in a few cases, developing their very first national youth policy. Afghanistan is one of these countries.

In 2013, Afghanistan's Deputy Ministry of Youth Affairs has worked closely with UNFPA, UNDP and UNICEF to design the country's first National Youth Policy. This study was commissioned in order to fill an important gap in stakeholders' understanding of who the youth are in Afghanistan and to provide robust recommendations to support youth-sensitive programming and to design a National Youth Strategy, within the broader framework of the policy process.

The findings from this research study led by Samuel Hall – with fieldwork led in 15 provinces of Afghanistan, and an in-depth and representative survey of Afghan youth in the rural and urban areas of 7 main provinces – paint a portrait of the Afghan youth and describe the voice of a generation. It records their beliefs, attitudes and aspirations, and assesses their status within a number of key sectors – education, employment, health, media and civic engagement. The recommendations of this report are intended to serve stakeholders in designing youth-sensitive programmes and mainstreaming youth needs in the development of the country's first National Youth Strategy.

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<sup>1</sup> Central Statistics Organization (2013), *Afghanistan Statistical Yearbook 2012-2013*, Area & Administrative Population, P.4.

<sup>2</sup> Kamminga, J. (2012), *From security transition to civilian power: Supporting Afghan youth after 2014*, Policy Brief no. 8, The Clingendael Institute.

<sup>3</sup> World Bank (2004) *The Devil in the Demographics: The Effect of Youth Bulges on Domestic Armed Conflict 1950-2000*



## 1.1 Objective of this assessment

The Deputy Ministry of Youth Affairs of the Government of Afghanistan (DMoYA) and its key partner UN agencies – the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) – commissioned researchers at Samuel Hall Consulting to conduct a participatory assessment of youth in Afghanistan. The objectives of this assignment were two-fold:

- a) Collect quantitative and qualitative data including research and analyses of youth situation in Afghanistan, according to a range of socio-economic indicators
- b) Support Deputy Ministry of Youth Affairs to develop evidence-based youth programmes on the priority needs of the youth and mobilize resources for successful implementation.

The purpose of this report is to understand the conditions, aspirations and current state of youth in Afghanistan. Reports in the past have sporadically covered various aspects of a youth’s life<sup>4</sup>, but this survey constitutes the first attempt to develop a comprehensive understanding of the driving factors that influence the lives of youth through baseline data collected during a quantitative survey of 2658 youths in 15 provinces, focus group discussions and key informant interviews with local and international practitioners and experts. A cardinal assumption of this study is that it is not only important to grasp *what* the youth think about education and employment, but also *why* they hold these views.

This final report presents representative quantitative data from 7 provinces where the sampling allowed for a 95% confidence level and a 5% margin of error. The provinces are: Kabul, Herat, Balkh, Nangarhar, Kandahar, Badakhshan and Kunduz.

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<sup>4</sup> ACTED, Afghanistan Youth Strategy, Nov 2011. Sommers, M. (2006) *Youth and Conflict, A Brief Review of Available Literature*, p.14; Kamminga, J. (2012), *From security transition to civilian power: Supporting Afghan youth after 2014*, Policy Brief no. 8, The Clingendael Institute; Feinstein International Centre (2012), *Afghanistan: Humanitarianism in uncertain times*. For a detailed list, see the full bibliography of this report



## 1.2 What we talk about when we talk about youth

‘Youth in Afghanistan’ is not a homogenous group. There is an ongoing debate in Afghanistan about who, or what, constitutes a ‘youth’. This debate is fuelled by ambiguity over the legal ages of employment and marriage. Even if parameters based on age or demography to define youth were established<sup>5</sup>, those falling within the parameters would present a very complex tapestry of demography, backgrounds, expectations and aspirations. Youth programming in Afghanistan typically sets age brackets that represent “youth,” but no actual consensus exists among academics, international organizations, the GoA and Afghans themselves on who falls under the category of youth and who does not. Not only are the definitions of youth generally vague, they also differ from one authority to another.

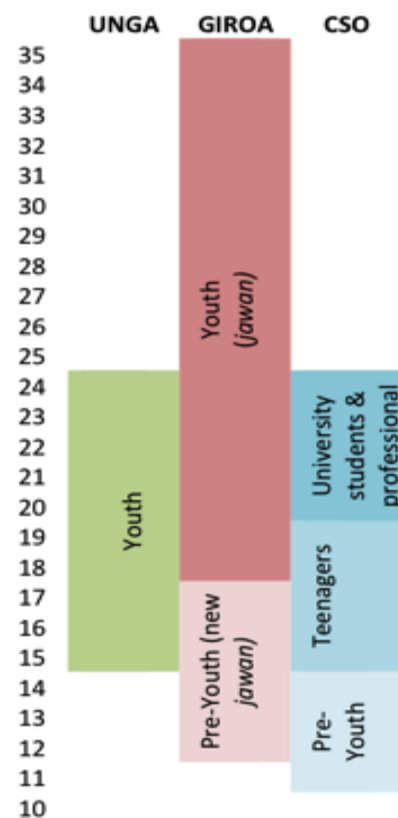
### State definition of Youth

According to the constitution of GoA, marriage before the age of 18 for males and 16 for females is prohibited, often beyond the start of puberty for both genders. It further divides “youth” into two categories: **Pre-youth** (*naw jawan*): Ages 12 – 17 and **Youth** (*jawan*): Ages 18 to 35.

The former represents school-age children and the latter young professionals. Both periods are dominated by major “first experiences,”<sup>6</sup> such as their first job interview, during which their “minds are still being shaped...[and they] are still formulating their ideas, their opinions.”<sup>7</sup> The division between *new youth* and *youth*, used by Government, represents a sociological understanding of ‘youth’ that was commonly heard during the field team’s interviews. Interviewees, whether key informants or youths themselves, focused on the importance of physical growth in defining “youth,” often prioritizing it over age. The UN General Assembly’s definition of youth covers those between the ages of 15 and 24, which, though the most universally accepted definition, fails to express what this ‘youth’ period entails in social or cultural terms.<sup>8</sup>

The sociological factor is complicated by the diversity of experiences in Afghanistan. In a country where it is not impossible that females marry at 14 or where males begin full-time jobs at the age of 15, the seemingly natural divide between high school and higher education and/or employment is

Graph 1 – Comparison of youth years



<sup>5</sup> Presently, the GoA defines youth as those falling between the ages of 15-35 years. However, this definition is complex and not entirely representative of the youth population in Afghanistan. This report will discuss and problematize the debate surrounding the definition of youth in Afghanistan.

<sup>6</sup> Daniel Seckman, Former Director of YES and current Director of Admissions of the American University of Afghanistan, Oct 12 2012.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> UNESCO: *Acting with and for youth*, United Nations: <http://www.unesco.org/new/en/social-and-human-sciences/themes/youth/>

obfuscated<sup>9</sup>. Given that 74% of the Afghan population live in rural areas, this becomes particularly notable, as such areas have less access to education and marriages typically occur earlier<sup>10</sup>.

Disagreement also exists within the government system. The Central Statistics Organization (CSO) does not uphold the GoA double divide of youth and, instead, implements its own three-part categorisation of youths that include:

- ✓ Pre-Youth: Ages 11 – 14
- ✓ Teenagers: Ages 15 – 19
- ✓ University Students and Young Professionals: Ages 20-25

The ambiguity surrounding the term ‘youth’ has notable implications for programming. Namely, any youth-targeted programming – whether provided by the GoA or international organizations – must specify target beneficiaries, thereby requiring a set of criteria for youth. While most actors implement their own inclusive definitions of youth, a more crosscutting definition that can be agreed upon by multiple cooperating agencies can clarify the difficulties of defining youth on the ground.

For the purpose of this report, the quantitative survey, the age group was defined according to the definition of the Central Statistics Organization – men and women aged between 15-25 years. The qualitative fieldwork extended to men and women between the ages of 15-30 years through focus group discussions and case studies. As shown in the box below this pragmatic and flexible identification of youth is in line with the definition currently used by most UN agencies.

#### What do we mean by ‘youth’? A definition from UNESCO

‘Youth’ is best understood as a period of transition from the dependence of childhood to adulthood’s independence and awareness of our interdependence as members of a community. Youth is a more fluid category than a fixed age group. However, age is the easiest way to define this group, particularly in relation to education and employment. Therefore ‘youth’ is often indicated as a person between the age where he/she may leave compulsory education, and the age at which he/she finds his/her first employment. This latter age limit has been increasing, as higher levels of unemployment and the cost of setting up an independent household puts many young people into a prolonged period of dependency. [...]

The UN, for statistical consistency across regions, defines ‘youth’, as those persons between the ages of 15 and 24 years, without prejudice to other definitions by Member States. All UN statistics on youth are based on this definition, as illustrated by the annual yearbooks of statistics published by the United Nations system on demography, education, employment and health<sup>11</sup>.

<sup>9</sup> Of the 17.3% of women aged 15-19 who are married, for example, 4% were married by age 15. For married 20-24 year olds (66.2% of group), that figure jumps to 13.7% (Afghan Public Health Institute (2011), *Afghanistan Mortality Survey 2010*, p. 52). 33% of 12-14 year old boys work (CSO (2008), *National Risk and Vulnerability Assessment 2007/2008* (NRVA), (p.35))

<sup>10</sup> 2007/8 NRVA, p.11

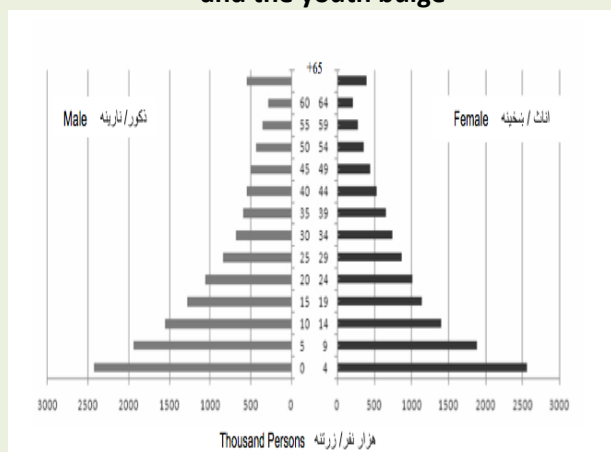
<sup>11</sup> UNESCO, <http://www.unesco.org/new/en/social-and-human-sciences/themes/youth/youth-definition/>

## The youth bulge: threat or opportunity?

The total population of Afghanistan in 2012/2013 is estimated at 27 million with 51% males and 49% females<sup>12</sup>. The current population growth rate is reckoned to be one of the fastest in the world at 2.8%<sup>13</sup>. With a birth rate at 5.3 per woman, Afghanistan is one of the youngest countries in the world. As a result, and according to the **Afghanistan Mortality Survey (AMS)** in 2010, nearly half of Afghanistan's population (47%) is under the age of 15<sup>14</sup> and 16% is under the age of 5. This means that more than half of the country's population is fast approaching employment age, providing the country with a solid human resource base. In effect, every year, 400,000 Afghan youth enter the labour market in search of stable employment opportunities. According to the survey, 27.8% of the population is between the ages of 15 and 30 years with almost 15% on the threshold of entering the 15-20-age bracket<sup>15</sup> – which also corresponds to the threshold of the labour market of an increasingly shrinking economy.

Potential impacts can be far-ranging – both positive and negative. A pessimistic analysis would lead towards an economic crisis in the form of an educated but unemployed work force, which could potentially instigate either a mass exodus of skilled labour from the country or recruitment by insurgent groups, which offer an alternative channel for participating in state governance. A more optimistic approach would focus on the intellectual capacity for entrepreneurship, technological innovation and cultural ambassadorship.

**Graph 2 - Afghanistan's demographic structure and the youth bulge**



Due to high fertility rates (5.1; AMS 2010) and a consequent annual population growth of 2.8%, the demographic age structure of Afghanistan's population is represented by a pyramid with a large base of younger aged population narrowing as age increases. The pyramid structure shown here implies that at present, there is no demographic transition-taking place in Afghanistan. This has consequences for the economic and social development of the country. Secondly, unlike other countries, the male to female ratio in Afghanistan has been recorded at 103:101 (AMS 2010).

**Source – CSO Afghanistan Statistical Yearbook 2012-2013**

According to the 2007/8 NRVA, the sex ratio across age groups follows a pattern in which boys outnumber the number of girls in early childhood. This gap in ratio steadily reduces as the age group increases. The reasons cited for this are *a)* small excess of boys at birth followed by *b)* higher mortality rates of males over females. The large youth population has been dubbed, 'the youth bulge'.

<sup>12</sup> Central Statistics Organization (2013), *Afghanistan Statistical Yearbook 2012-2013*, Area & Administrative Population, P.3

<sup>13</sup> Lavender, L. (2011), *The Youth Bulge in Afghanistan: Challenges and Opportunities*

<sup>14</sup> Afghan Public Health Institute (2011), *Afghanistan Mortality Survey 2010*, p.19

<sup>15</sup> Afghan Public Health Institute (2011), *Afghanistan Mortality Survey 2010*, Table 2.1, p. 19

The population pyramid presented shows the Afghan population distribution. The large youth population at the base and the reduced older age ranges give Afghanistan's population pyramid the classic appearance of a country with a significant **youth bulge** – a demographic term that defines a population in which the proportion of young people is significantly larger than older age groups.

This youth bulge is a key concern in the development and stability of poor nations. In 2004, the World Bank released a paper on *The Devil in the Demographics: The Effect of Youth bulges on Domestic Armed Conflict*, to show that the combination of youth bulges and poor economic performance can be “explosive” (WB, 2004). This and other sources have analysed whether youth bulges make countries more unstable or prone to conflict. At a time of transition in Afghanistan – with 2014 being the official transition year – the question of the youth's relationship and contribution to Afghanistan is a central one.

Young people in Afghanistan are facing a complex and dual transition process – their own transition to adulthood, and their country's political and military transition in 2014. However, the youth in Afghanistan remain largely outside the radar of policy-makers: reconstruction and development have not matched their high expectations and most young people still feel politically disenfranchised. Insurgent groups in some parts of the country use this growing frustration to recruit more young people in their ranks. In other words, the segment of the population that could be utilized as an engine to rebuild Afghanistan could instead become a threat. Research is needed to explore the extent to which young people are engaged with mainstream Afghan society and the decision-making processes that govern the country. These are particularly important questions to ask in light of the upcoming presidential elections and international troop withdrawal in 2014. But who are the ‘youths’ of Afghanistan? How can they be defined?



**Photo 1: Female Youth in a Dormitory**

## 1.3 Cross-cutting & Contextual issues

✓ *What are the key variables to comprehend such a multifaceted demographic, social, economic and political concept as 'youth'?*

### Conceptualizing youth in Afghanistan

The age range defined above – 15 to 25 – corresponds in many Western countries to periods of secondary and higher education, independence from family and relative freedom from responsibility. When considering the case of Afghanistan, one ought to keep in mind that the situation is very different, and avoid the lure of interpreting information through this lens. Women, in particular, are likely to be married and have children: according to the AMS, 65.7% of women aged 20-24 are married, as are 17.3% of those aged 15-19. Among these married women, by age 24 only 18.6% have never had a child<sup>16</sup>. Unmarried young people tend to still be living with their families and under parental rule.

### The urban-rural divide

In addition to the complexities highlighted above, the lives of the youth in rural areas are considerably different to those who live in the main urban areas such as Kabul, Mazar-e-Sharif, Herat, Jalalabad, or Kandahar. The poverty levels in rural areas are significantly higher than in urban centres – 76% of the Afghan population lives in rural areas<sup>17</sup>. Whilst a youth in Kabul has better access to education, social media, health facilities and more diversified employment opportunities, those who live in rural areas often have reduced access to basic services and limited job options (almost exclusively in the agriculture sector). Whilst a youth in Mazar-e-Sharif or Herat may soon have to deal with a worsening socio-economic environment and the question of migrating to neighbouring Iran or Pakistan, insecurity and criminality in the rural districts of Southern and Eastern provinces often lead the youth and their households to migrate to safer urban areas. These challenges and the subsequent rural-urban migration and pressure on urban absorption capacities require an equally balanced, yet contextualized, approach to youth programming in urban and rural areas.

### The gender lens: women's aspirations and a challenging reality

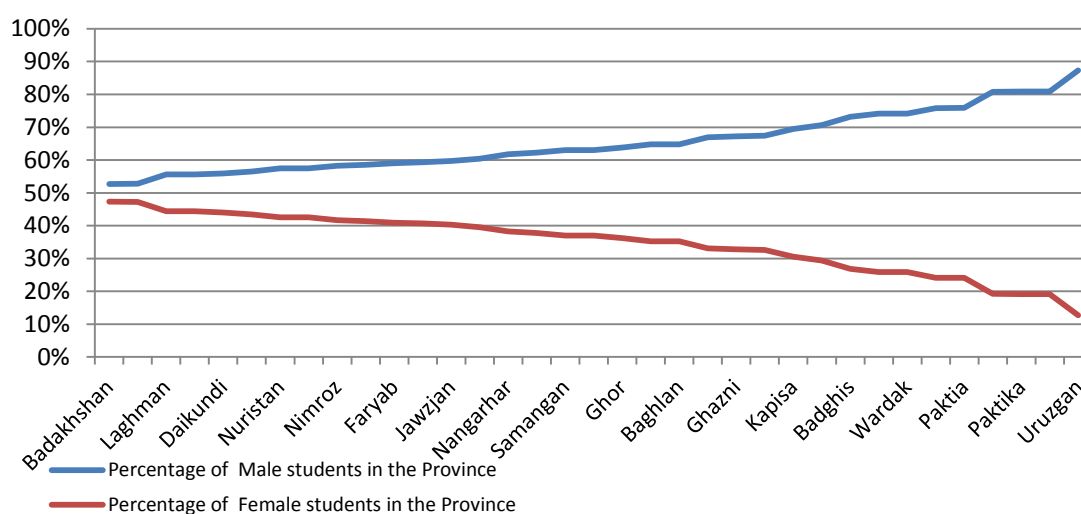
When analysing the situation of Afghan youth, gender is of course a key variable. While the total numbers of female teachers, female students and all-girls' schools have increased, these figures are still very low in overall terms: only 39% of students and 31% of teachers are female in general education, and at the university level only 19% of students are female<sup>18</sup>.

<sup>16</sup> Afghan Public Health Institute (2011), *Afghanistan Mortality Survey 2010*, pp. 45, 51

<sup>17</sup> World Bank – World Development Indicators: <http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.URB.TOTL.IN.ZS>

<sup>18</sup> Ministry of Education 1390 Data Set – “Students by program and gender” and Central Statistics Organisation - “Afghanistan Statistical Yearbook 2011-2012”

**Graph 3 - Percentage of male and female students in government schools<sup>19</sup>**



Source – World Bank / Samuel Hall (2013), *Country Gender Assessment*

Second to a lack of education (25%), respondents in the *2011 Asia Foundation Survey* consider a lack of rights to be one of the biggest challenges facing women in Afghanistan (15%)<sup>20</sup>. Likewise, compared to men, women work fewer hours, earn less, are more likely to work in vulnerable employment and have limited financial autonomy: the NRVA figures from 2007/8 report that 96% of working women are in vulnerable employment<sup>21</sup>. In this regard, the situation of girls is determined by the reality of often constraining socio-cultural norms. This study will assess the Afghan youth through the gender lens, to better grasp the existing differences between girls' and boys' situations and aspirations.

✓ *What are the social, economic, and political challenges of a fast-changing Afghan environment?*

### **Economic context: Scarcity of jobs for urban and rural youth**

Over the past twelve years, Afghanistan's socio-economic development has been largely fuelled by the services sector. As of 2011, over half of Afghanistan's GDP was derived from 'services' (telecoms, IT, transportation, retail trade, etc.), which has been steadily increasing since 2002. Industry, by comparison, has remained comparatively static as a proportion of GDP and agriculture has been declining as a proportion of Afghanistan's GDP in relative terms since 2002. However, the growth of the services sector is largely due to the presence of international aid organizations, NGOs and NATO forces. With the international withdrawal, the likely collapse of the services and construction sector over the next decade will heavily impact urban areas – and the urban youth. This raises serious

<sup>19</sup> World Bank/Samuel Hall (2013), *Country Gender Assessment* (forthcoming)

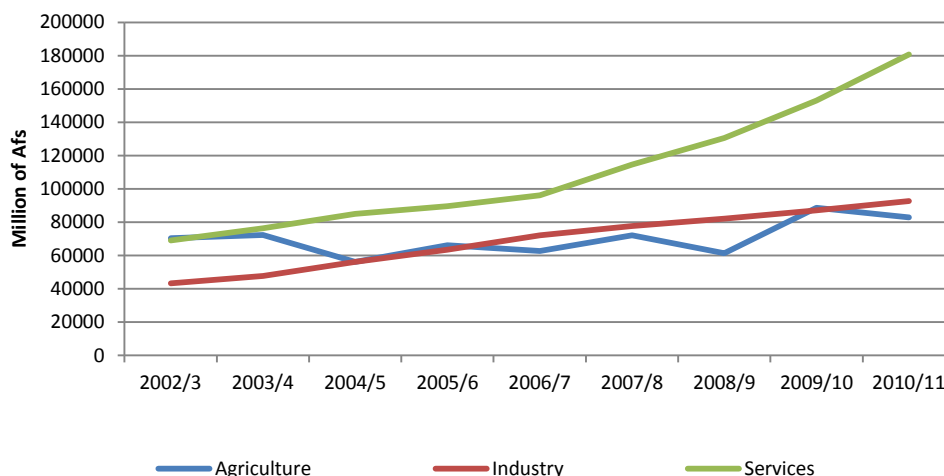
<sup>20</sup> Asia Foundation (2011), *Afghanistan in 2011: A Survey of the Afghan People*, Kabul.

<sup>21</sup> ILO defines vulnerable employment as being informal and insecure and typified by unstable and inadequate earnings, low productivity and a lack of 'safety nets' to mitigate risks during dire straits (Key Indicators of the Labour Market, Sixth Edition, ILO 2009 - Chapter 1, section C).



concerns for stability and security in Afghanistan<sup>22</sup>. The country is thus expected to have little economic generation capacity by 2014, with the exception of uncertain mineral resources<sup>23</sup> and a still flourishing illegal narcotics trade<sup>24</sup>.

**Graph 4 - Contribution to GDP by Sector**



Source – World Bank 2011, Samuel Hall 2012

## Social context: Massive internal displacement and migration

If we now focus on the direct consequences of a deteriorating political and economic context on local populations, there is clearly a second time bomb: a social one, directly related to internal and cross-border migration phenomena. In the first six months of 2012 alone, an estimated 500,000 people had been displaced from their homes, with over 100,000 new conflict-induced internally displaced persons (IDPs). As shown in the recent NRC/Samuel Hall *IDP Protection Study*, if most of these IDPs (57%) reported having left their province of origin for security reasons, a significant percentage of respondents (17%) said that they had migrated for economic reasons – as shown in the chart below<sup>25</sup>. In this critical context, insecurity and economic factors may lead a significant number of rural households to migrate to urban and peri-urban areas; considering the absence of any resilient economic safety net in today’s Afghan urban centres, as well as the lack of positive labour market perspectives, this trend of massive internal displacement and economic migration

<sup>22</sup> Dr. Ashraf Ghani, “Preparing for Transition: A Policy Note on Development,” policy memo sent to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee Majority Staff, May 12, 2011. In its ‘Transition in Afghanistan, looking beyond 2014’ presentation of November 2011, the World Bank already warned of a recession in the crucial transition year of 2014 and of serious fiscal gaps (up to US\$ 7 billion or € 5.3 billion) until at least 2021. It also posits that a slowdown in aid will be felt more in acute-conflicted affected areas than others.

<sup>23</sup> See Samuel Hall Consulting/ILO (2012): *Afghanistan: Time to Move to Sustainable Jobs: Study on the State of Employment*, June 2012, Kabul, p.19.

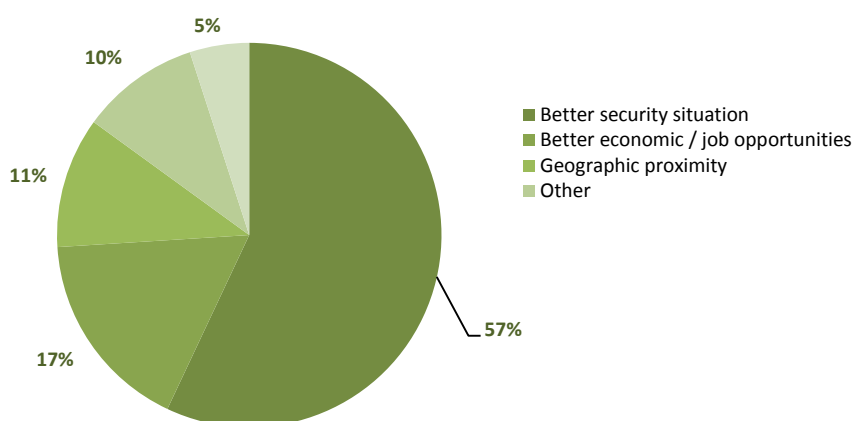
<sup>24</sup> Unaccounted for in official statistics and larger in size than the formal agricultural sector, the illegal opium sector accounted for an estimated additional 9% of GDP in 2011, according to UNODC: the total farm-gate value of opium production accounted for US\$ 1,407 million in 2011 (UNODC (2011) *Afghanistan Opium Survey*).

<sup>25</sup> Samuel Hall/NRC/IDMC/JIPS (2012), *Challenges of IDP Protection: Research study on protection of internally displaced persons in Afghanistan*, Kabul.



may put the fragile demographic, social and economic urban equilibrium at risk. The 2007 NRVA describes youth as finding migration “particularly attractive<sup>26</sup>.”

**Graph 5 - Primary factor in the choice of destination for IDPs**



Source – Samuel Hall (2012), Challenges of IDP Protection Survey

### Political context: A risk of emigration to neighbouring countries?

Furthermore, another phenomenon may soon threaten the long-term. Today, 4 million Afghan refugees continue to reside in Iran and Pakistan. An estimated 6 million refugees have returned, 4.5 million of whom with the assistance of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). Many may require further assistance to re-establish their lives and livelihoods<sup>27</sup>. However, return and reintegration may not be seen as priorities in today’s environment, as: 1) in the medium run, a massive emigration phenomenon to Pakistan and Iran can be expected (from both urban and rural areas) if the security situation does get worse; 2) likewise, in the medium- to long-run, the worsening economic environment may lead a significant proportion of the 400,000 youth who join the labour market every year to migrate to the neighbouring Iran and Pakistan; in urban centres, which will be more impacted by the collapse of the services sector, a massive emigration of the most educated and skilled urban youth to Iran, Pakistan, and Western countries may soon be a reality.

### Impact on security: Fuelling the insurgency?

Arguably, in today’s volatile social and economic context, the youth bulge may manifest itself in a large class of young and able people with heightened dissatisfaction from continued unemployment and lack of opportunities. In both urban and rural settings, most young people still feel politically disenfranchised, and insurgent groups in some parts of the country have used this growing frustration to recruit more young people in their ranks. So the segment of the population that should have been utilized as an engine to rebuild Afghanistan may instead become a threat: *“Young disillusioned men are crucial to the Taliban for a number of reasons. [...] The real attraction to the*

<sup>26</sup> CSO (2008), *National Risk and Vulnerability Assessment 2007/2008 (NRVA)*, p. 104

<sup>27</sup> Samuel Hall/MGSOG (2013), *Evaluation of UNHCR’s Shelter Assistance Programme 2009-2011*, for UNHCR Afghanistan.

*Taliban has very little to do with fundamentalism and everything to do with an isolated and down trodden youth. An increase in general security, food security and youth employment would starve the Taliban of recruits, traffickers, fighters and funds*".<sup>28</sup> As an answer to this clearly identified risk, the emphasis has increasingly been placed on providing employment, through stabilization or civil-military programmes, as a means to lure young men away from the insurgency. However, the evidence that stabilization or civil-military programmes promote stability in Afghanistan is mixed<sup>29</sup>, especially when most actors favour the creation of a high number of casual and short-term jobs (daily wage labour) over the development of sustainable employment creation plans.

✓ *What are the existing national and international programmes and mitigating strategies?*

## International programmes

Until now, development activities in Afghanistan vis-à-vis the youth have been haphazard. The main programme to have been implemented specifically to target the youth was UNDP's Joint National Youth Programme. This programme started in 2007 and lasted until 2009. The programme, which was a collaboration between 8 Afghan ministries and 7 UN agencies<sup>30</sup>, was aimed at strengthening the capacity of the Government to respond to the needs of the youth of the country, promoting non-formal education, increasing awareness and developing skills (literacy, leadership, strategic planning, conflict resolution, peace-building, etc.) in young people so as to provide better quality of life and livelihood opportunities, engaging youth in governance, development and social-political processes at local, district, municipal, provincial and national level, ensuring the participation of young women and men in democracy and advocacy and promoting volunteerism for peace and development and establishing a youth volunteer corps for Afghanistan. Due to ambitious objectives, lack of base-line data, coordination issues and a lack of resources, this programme was not renewed beyond 2009. Instead, the National Institution Building Programme, also funded by UNDP was tasked with building the capacity of DMOYA.

Various NGOs like the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC), Sports Sans Frontières (SSF), Action Aid, ACTED or Mercy Corps, as well as private agencies like *Internews*, have been implementing programmes for the development of youth. The limitations of these programmes are that they do not have nationwide coverage and they do not reach areas where youth are perhaps the most vulnerable. In the same vein, vocational training that is provided by a number of organizations across the country is supply-based rather than demand-driven, evidenced by the fact that there has

<sup>28</sup> Weir, S. (2013), *The Struggle for Afghanistan's Youth*, The Guardian <http://www.guardian.co.uk/journalismcompetition/the-struggle-for-afghanistans-youth>.

<sup>29</sup> Berman, Eli; Callen, Michael; Felter, Joseph H., and Jacob N. Shapiro, *Do Working Men Rebel? Insurgency and Unemployment in Afghanistan, Iraq, and the Philippines*, Journal of Conflict Resolution, March 22, 2011. Quoted in a June 2011 report from the US Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, *Evaluating US Foreign Assistance to Afghanistan*", 112<sup>th</sup> Congress, 1<sup>st</sup> Session, June 8, 2011. Available at: <http://www.gpoaccess.gov/congress/index.html>

<sup>30</sup> These agencies include UNDP, Unicef, HABITAT/USAID, UNFPA, UNV, UNESCO and MoIC, MoE, MoLSA, MoPH, MoHE, MoJ, MRRD, MoWA from the government and CSOs

never been a comprehensive labour market assessment in Afghanistan<sup>31</sup>. However, it is worth noting that, more recently, actors like Mercy Corps in Southern and North-Western provinces, GIZ and AKF in the North and North-East, or HELP in the East, have based their training curricula and material on longer-term strategies and rapid socio-economic assessments of their respective local labour markets.

## Governmental institutions

From the government's side, a ministry dedicated to Youth Affairs was established in 2005. However in 2006, this ministry was seconded to the Ministry of Information and Culture. The deputy ministry, now called the Deputy Ministry of Youth Affairs (DMoYA), runs under the leadership of a Deputy Minister who supervises its provincial sub-directorates under the Directorates of Information and Culture. DMOYA does not have its own development budget, nor the capability to implement programmes. It therefore partners with other international organizations like UNDP, UNFPA, UNHABITAT and UNICEF, to implement programmes for the youth. In addition, ministries like the Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development (MRRD) through the National Solidarity Programme (NSP) or the Ministry of Education (MoEd) through their education programmes, often work with the youth. However, a comprehensive approach to address the challenges of the youth is lacking. This has been exacerbated by the absence of a National Youth Policy that informs decision-making and interventions, keeping in mind, the supply and demand factor. This gap has been addressed in 2013 with the development of a National Youth Policy by DMOYA and its UN partners. The National Youth Policy was publicly launched in Kabul in June 2013 and is now awaiting endorsement.

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<sup>31</sup> Key informant interview with an ILO Representative, Kabul, Afghanistan

## 1.4 Methodology

Fieldwork was conducted by Samuel Hall research teams in three phases between 19<sup>th</sup> September and 10<sup>th</sup> October 2012:

- a) **Phase 1:** 720 interviews with youth in Kabul province.
- b) **Phase 2:** 1938 interviews in 14 provinces – Nangarhar, Balkh, Bamyan, Paktia, Kandahar, Faryab, Herat, Ghazni, Badakhshan, Kunduz, Baghlan, Nimroz, Panjshir and Parwan.
- c) **Phase 3:** 300 interviews as part of 3 additional focused surveys in Kabul city alone on education, employment and female reproductive health. These focused surveys aimed to fill in gaps identified during the previous two phases of the survey.

The surveys were informed and substantiated by secondary desk research of existing literature, key informant interviews of stakeholders both in the provinces and in Kabul, case studies and focus group discussions of different categories of youth.

While the quantitative survey defined ‘youth’ as those individuals between 15 and 25 years of age for the quantitative survey, in keeping with the Central Statistics Office’s definition, to aid in establishing a coherent database on youth in Afghanistan, a broader definition was adopted for the qualitative research in order to capture realistic perceptions of Afghans rather than restricting the scope of the survey to arbitrary classifications. For the qualitative fieldwork, those young people who had passed the ‘technical’ age bracket, but were still under the age of 30, were interviewed. This was to capture the perceptions of young people, who had recently experienced what it was to be a youth in Afghanistan.

This report presents representative data from 7 provinces where the sampling allowed for a 95% confidence level and a 5% margin of error. The provinces are: Kabul, Herat, Balkh, Nangarhar, Kandahar, Badakhshan and Kunduz. The proportional sampling approach did not allow for a representative sample of youth in the remaining provinces surveyed and hence, not included in this final report. The sampling technique may have introduced a small bias in favour urban area. A comprehensive account of the methodological approach used for this study is detailed in the Annex – Research Methodology section of this report. Data from national surveys was included to provide a more general context; caution must be exercised when making direct comparisons between national statistics and our survey due to differing sample sizes.



**Photo 2: Schoolgirls in Keraman, Panjshir**

## 1.5 Structure of the Report

The report begins by providing a context analysis of youth in Afghanistan. It then follows a structure where tangible factors that influence youth and intangible factors that are influenced by youth are divided into themes. Themes have been divided in such a way as to facilitate analysis and identify the areas where policy makers can have a direct impact.

- ✓ The first section, **“Portrait of the Afghan Youth”**, draws a general landscape of the social, economic, cultural, and political characteristics of the youth at a time of transition for their country.
- ✓ The second section, **“Voices of a Generation”**, focuses on how youth perceive their own role in the future of Afghanistan and their current participation.
- ✓ The third and last section, **“Strategy and Recommendations”**, builds on the key findings of this survey and a needs-based analysis to assist policymakers in identifying target groups and tailoring programmes to their specific needs.



Picture 3: Young Girl, Kabul Afghanistan



## 2. PORTRAIT OF THE AFGHAN YOUTH

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The topics that matter the most to Afghan youth today – whether in urban or rural areas – are education, employment, health and information & communications. Based on the quantitative findings of this study, this section will provide a portrait of young people surveyed, focusing on key variables identified in the introduction.

The following section paints a portrait of young people in Afghanistan in four key areas, **education, health, employment, and media use.**

Analysing how Afghan young men and women fare in each of these key areas provides a baseline and contextual background for further analysis on youth aspirations and perceptions, as factors such as education, health, access to employment or access to communication and information impact the ways youths engage with society, today, and see their future, tomorrow.

This section of the report draws on data gathered through a representative quantitative survey conducted in the provinces of Kabul, Balkh, Badakhshan, Herat, Kunduz, Kandahar and Nangarhar. Data is presented for each province to provide a comparative lens, illustrating differences and similarities across provinces, with a particular focus on gender and urban-rural divides. Quantitative data from Baghlan, Faryab, Ghazni, Paktya, Parwan, Bamyan, Nimroz and Panjshir have not been included in this analysis, but observations and qualitative fieldwork from these provinces fuel the overall analysis. Where appropriate, data is presented from wider national surveys in order to provide deeper contextual information, as requested by the Deputy Ministry of Youth Affairs.



## 2.1 Education

### Introduction

Education policy has led to increasing levels of literacy and school enrolment, but the education system is poorly equipped to prepare young people for the realities of the Afghan labour market. Youths consider education to be a gateway to a brighter future, but an increasing number of students want to study abroad, rather than in Afghanistan, due to a lack of university places and the quality of education overseas.

### KEY SURVEY FINDINGS

- **Enrolment and literacy continue to rise:** 81% of respondents attended an education institution, and 84% are literate.
- **The gap between rural and urban literacy is closing:** 79.8% and 77.7% respectively are literate with schooling.
- **Educational achievement is highly valued as dropout rates for students drop drastically at each level of schooling:** from 57.2% of surveyed youth at primary school level to close to zero at university level.
- By comparison, 65.1% of males and 41.5% of females who went only to primary school say that they dropped out. This is consistent in both urban (58.1%) and rural (56.0%) settings surveyed.
- However, **gender inequalities persist in Kandahar:** 62.3% of surveyed girls are illiterate without schooling.
- **Young Afghans are ambitious.** 26.2% of the respondents want to become a doctor, 14.8% a teacher and 14.6% an engineer. **Currently these ambitions are limited by a lack of places at university.**
- **Some are frustrated by the lack of learning opportunities** abroad: many young people aspire to study overseas but there are few public funds available for them. 174 respondents had studied in neighbouring countries of Pakistan and Iran as refugees. The majority of those who had studied abroad in the sample were males living in urban areas.
- **Few scholarships are available for those wishing to study abroad:** Only 5 respondents had received scholarships from the Afghan government, while 5 others had received scholarships

#### NATIONAL STATISTICS

- **7.9 million** children in Afghanistan are in schools<sup>32</sup>
- **45%**<sup>33</sup> is the ratio of girls to boys in secondary education
- **39% of youths were literate** in 2007 (53% men and 24% women). Urban populations (63%) had higher literacy rates than rural (33%) and Kuchi (12%) populations<sup>34</sup>
- **85%** of people in Afghanistan think that men and women should have **equal access to education**<sup>35</sup>
- Primary-school dropout rate is **54.6%**<sup>36</sup>
- **50%** of high school graduates in 2011 were **unable to attend university** due to lack of places<sup>37</sup>

<sup>32</sup> CSO (2012), *Afghanistan Statistical Yearbook 2011-2012* – Central Statistics Organization, Kabul.

<sup>33</sup> *MDG report final* p. 26

<sup>34</sup> *NRVA 2007/8*, p.66

<sup>35</sup> The Asia Foundation (2011), *A Survey of the Afghan People*, p.7

<sup>36</sup> <http://www.undp.org/content/afghanistan/en/home/countryinfo/>

<sup>37</sup> The World Bank (2013), *Higher Education In Afghanistan*, p. 19



from other institutions and governments of foreign countries. 87% of those who had gone abroad had paid for it themselves or through their families.

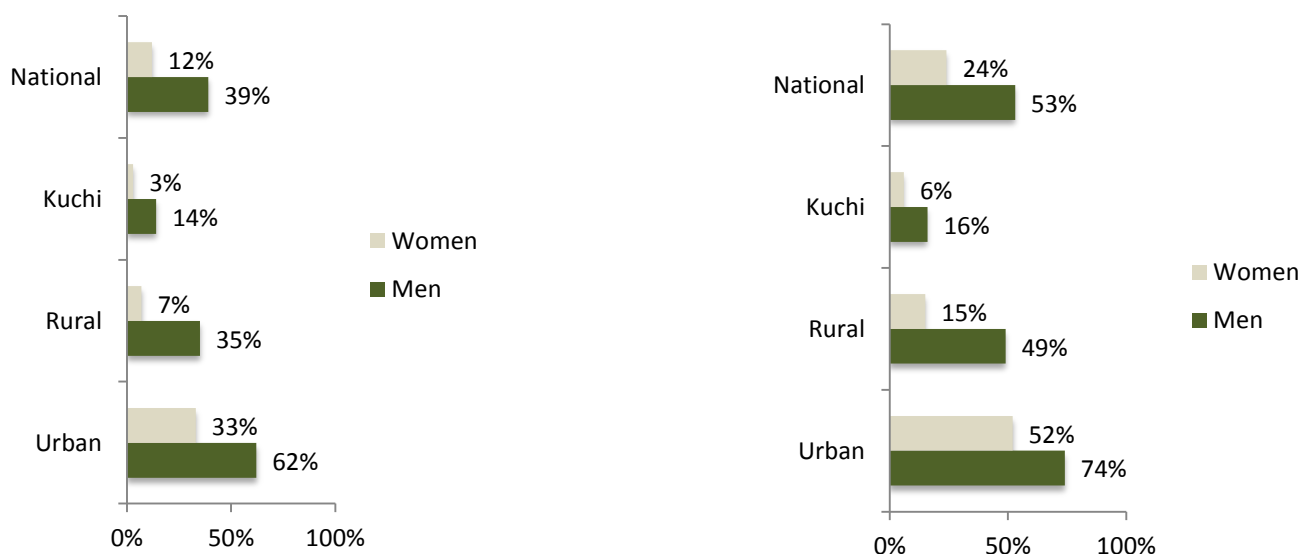
- 71% of young Afghans think that education will help them find a job, but **there are limited career opportunities in Afghanistan**, which could lead to an eventual *brain drain*. 61% of youths who attended a technical training course were unable to find employment.
- When asked how the government was working to help young Afghans, only 30.5% mentioned government efforts around education.

## Literacy

One of the most important indicators for education improvement in Afghanistan is literacy. Unlike other indicators (such as the number of schools, or the number of students), literacy levels can provide direct evidence for both the quality and prevalence of education.

The data gathered in this survey show that levels of literacy are on the rise. As of 2007/2008, the overall youth literacy rate was 39%<sup>38</sup>. Today, the level of literacy in the surveyed provinces is 84%. The recent figures in this study reflect the significant focus from the Government and the international community to increase levels of literacy. In addition, these figures show that the gap between urban and rural levels of literacy among young people has closed significantly over the last few years. Graph 6 shows the stark difference among men and women in urban and rural settings in 2007/2008.

**Graph 6 - Literacy Rates by Gender and Location Overall Population**      **Graph 7 - Literacy Rates by Gender and Location Youths 15-24**

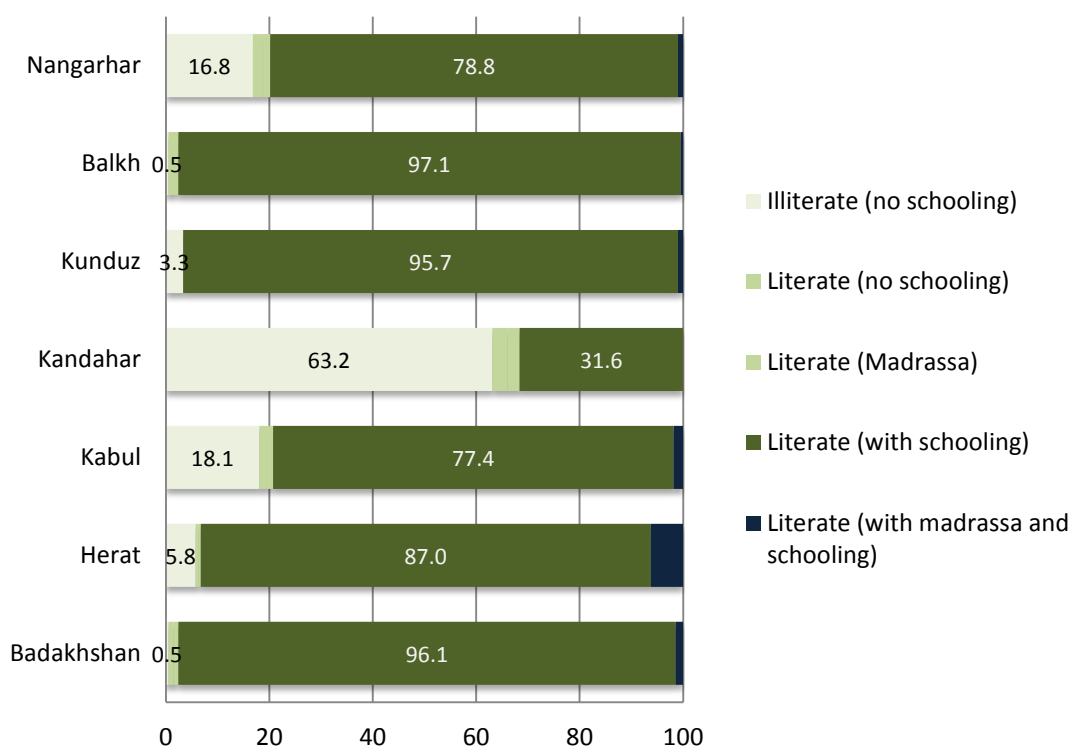


Source - 2007/8 NRVA

<sup>38</sup> NRVA 2007/8, p. 66

Today, the gap is almost negligible among the surveyed groups: 90% of rural male youths are literate compared to 87% of urban male youths; and 75% of female rural youths are literate compare to 78% of female urban youths. Overall, younger generations are more likely to be literate than the preceding generations. Data from the AMICS survey highlight this trend among young women specifically: the younger age groups are more likely to be literate (in 2010-2011 the literacy rate was 14.8% for women aged 20-24 and 27.7% for women aged 15-19)<sup>39</sup>. Although the overall picture for women remains fairly bleak, here progress can be observed by comparing different age groups: the ratio between the female and male literacy rate improves with younger cohorts, ranging from 57% for 15 year olds to 26% for 25 year olds<sup>40</sup>.

**Graph 8 - Literacy by province**



Base: All respondents (n=1965)

Significant proportions of youths in each of the surveyed provinces are literate with schooling (from 31.6% in Kandahar to 97.1% in Balkh). When looking at the figures more closely, approximately equal proportions of urban and rural youths in the surveyed areas say that they are 'literate with schooling' – 79.8% and 77.7% respectively. This is a reflection of the focus on early education across Afghanistan, in which new schools and classrooms have been built to match the growing demand for education.

Differences in levels of literacy still exist at a regional level. The notable example is Kandahar, in which 63.2% of respondents say that they are illiterate without any schooling. This could be due to internal displacement and disruption due to continued and ongoing violence in the province but it is

<sup>39</sup> CSO and UNICEF (2013), *Afghanistan Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (AMICS)*, Kabul, p. 110

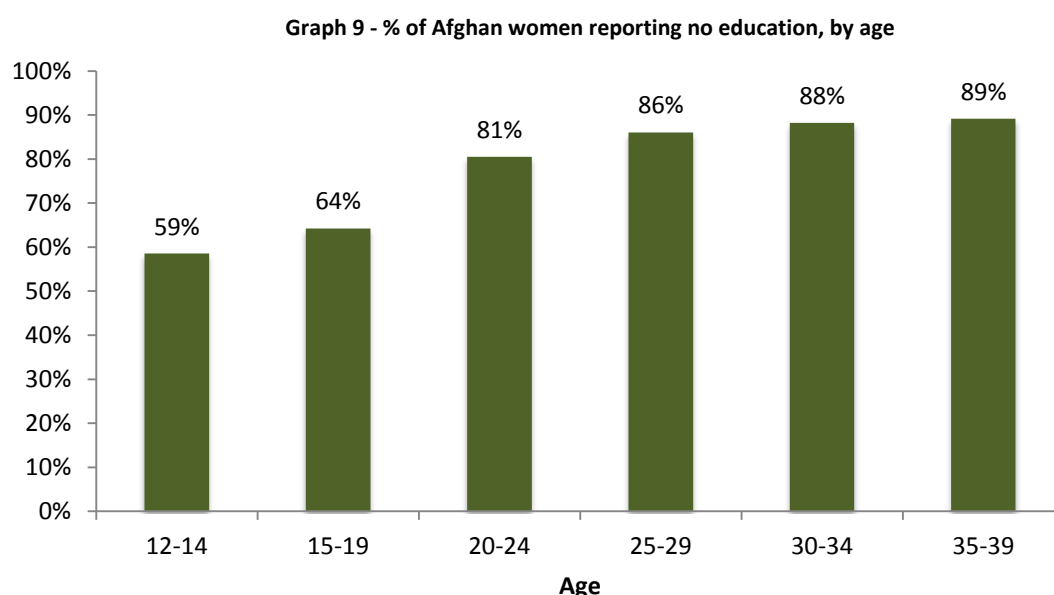
<sup>40</sup> *NRVA 2007/8*, p. 68

also related to the fact that 90.3% of young women in Kandahar say that they are illiterate with no schooling, and another 7.2% say that they are literate with no schooling, revealing a worrying low access of young women to education in the province.

So, whilst overall the efforts put in education by national authorities and international donors have paid off, increasing significantly the level of literacy of young generations compared to their parents, yet, inequalities in terms of access to schooling remain, as for young girls and women in Kandahar.

## Levels of Education

A look at the levels of education of the youths in this survey confirms the positive trend. Overall, 81.5% of respondents (1601 out of 1965) say that they have received some form of education. The high proportion of young people who have attended a formal education institution is testament to the success of a post-Taliban effort to promote education at all levels of society. This phenomenon is not male specific: the graph below shows that younger women today are more likely to have been educated than previous generations.



Source – Afghanistan Mortality Survey 2010

Table 1 below summarises the proportion of respondents who attended, dropped out of, or completed each level of education at the time of the survey.

### a. Attendance

The number of pupils in primary and secondary school in Afghanistan has steadily increased over the past few years. The number of secondary students in government schools, most likely to be in our target group, has gone from 1.65 million in 2009-2010 to 2.16 million in 2011-2012 – an increase too large to be accounted for by the population bulge<sup>41</sup>. Whilst the bulk of respondents in our survey were attending high school, 11.5% of young respondents declared attending primary or secondary

<sup>41</sup> CSO (2012), *Afghanistan Statistical Yearbook 2011-2012* – Central Statistics Organization, Kabul. p. 66

schools, whilst above the age of 15 for primary school and 16 for secondary school, showing that a **significant proportion of youths attend school in lower grades than what their age prescribes.**

This is not an uncommon phenomenon in countries with similar profiles as Afghanistan<sup>42</sup> and may reflect several dynamics: from late entry at school, to multiple class repetitions or even a tendency for young girls to remain enrolled at school after completion as it is one of the few places of recreation or social interactions they have access to. At the other end of the spectrum, the survey found an encouraging rate of 17.9% of youths aged above 18 stated that they attended or completed university, indicating a positive dynamic of increasing access to higher education.

## b. Drop out

UNDP calculates the primary dropout rate at 54.6% in Afghanistan<sup>43</sup>, corresponding to the figures in our survey: as shown in the table below, the drop out rate decreases with the level of education, from 57.2% of those at primary school level to close to zero at university level. It is encouraging to see that the proportion of respondents who say that they have dropped out of university is extremely low. Indeed, only one male respondent said that they had dropped out of university.

**Table 1 - Attendance, dropout and completion by gender**

		Male		Female	
		Count	%	Count	%
Primary School	Attending	17	20.5	20	48.8
	Dropped out	54	65.1	17	41.5
	Completed	12	14.5	4	9.8
	Total	83	100.0	41	100.0
Secondary School	Attending	188	76.7	84	82.4
	Dropped out	47	19.2	14	13.7
	Completed	10	4.1	4	3.9
	Total	245	100.0	102	100.0
High School	Attending	522	84.9	299	87.7
	Dropped out	25	4.1	8	2.3
	Completed	68	11.1	34	10.0
	Total	615	100.0	341	100.0
Public University	Attending	40	63.5	35	57.4
	Dropped out	1	1.6	0	0.0
	Completed	22	34.9	26	42.6
	Total	63	100.0	61	100.0
Private University / Institution	Attending	25	89.3	16	72.7
	Dropped out	0	0.0	0	0.0
	Completed	3	10.7	6	27.3
	Total	28	100.0	22	100.0

Base: All respondents who are either 'literate with schooling' or 'literate with madrassa or schooling' (n=1601)

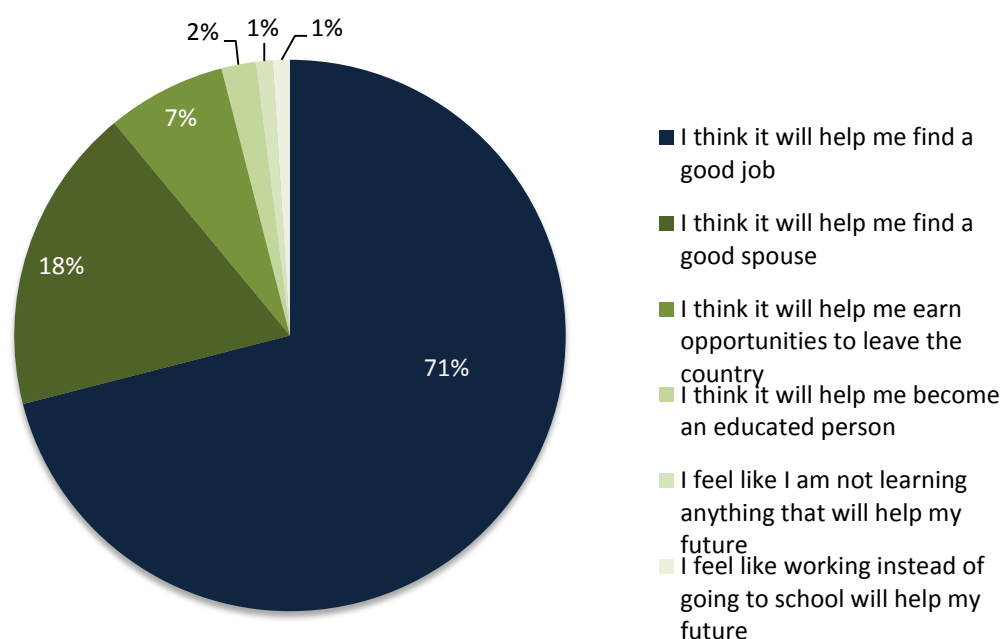
<sup>42</sup> See for example, UNICEF and UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2005, *Children out of school : Measuring Exclusion from Primary Education.*

<sup>43</sup> <http://www.undp.org/content/afghanistan/en/home/countryinfo/>

By comparison, 65.1% of males and 41.5% of females, who went only to primary school, say that they dropped out. Overall, this trend seems to be consistent in both urban (58.1%) and rural (56.0%) settings. There are many reasons why drop out rates are so much higher at primary school level than at higher levels. In particular, the limited number of university places (34,000, according to one estimate<sup>44</sup> in 2012) and the highly competitive nature of the *Concours* exams put a premium on every university seat. **In other words, once people have gained their hard-earned places at university, they are far less likely to give them up.**

In order to investigate this issue further, the research team at Samuel Hall conducted an additional small-scale survey in Kabul among 100 youths aged between 15-25. Graph 1.2 shows that almost three-quarters (70%) of those surveyed in Kabul say that education is important because it will help them to find a job. Approximately one fifth (18%) of respondents say that an education will help them to find a spouse. A very small proportion (7%) says that an education will help them to leave the country. These figures show that education is increasingly considered as one of the only available coping strategies to attempt at building a safe future for Afghan youths. This is in line with more general observations at the household level, where education is often seen as one of the only ways out of poverty<sup>45</sup>.

Graph 10 - Attitudes towards education



Base: All respondents in the Kabul Education Survey (n=100)

A regressive analysis to assess correlations between drop outs and poverty, gender and security is not feasible with the samples for this survey, but the following two conclusions can be drawn to highlight the need for programming focus on better understanding the drop out phenomenon:

<sup>44</sup> Sadat, S. (2012), "Higher Education? It's a Chinese Puzzle," *Afghanistan Today*, Kabul

<sup>45</sup> See for example, Samuel Hall (2011), *Jogi and Chori Frosh Out-of-School Children: A Story of Marginalisation*, for UNICEF.

First, significantly more primary educated boys than girls drop out indicating the possibility of them engaging in paid child labour, and of their families not seeing the benefits of a primary education, whose quality has been raised as an issue.

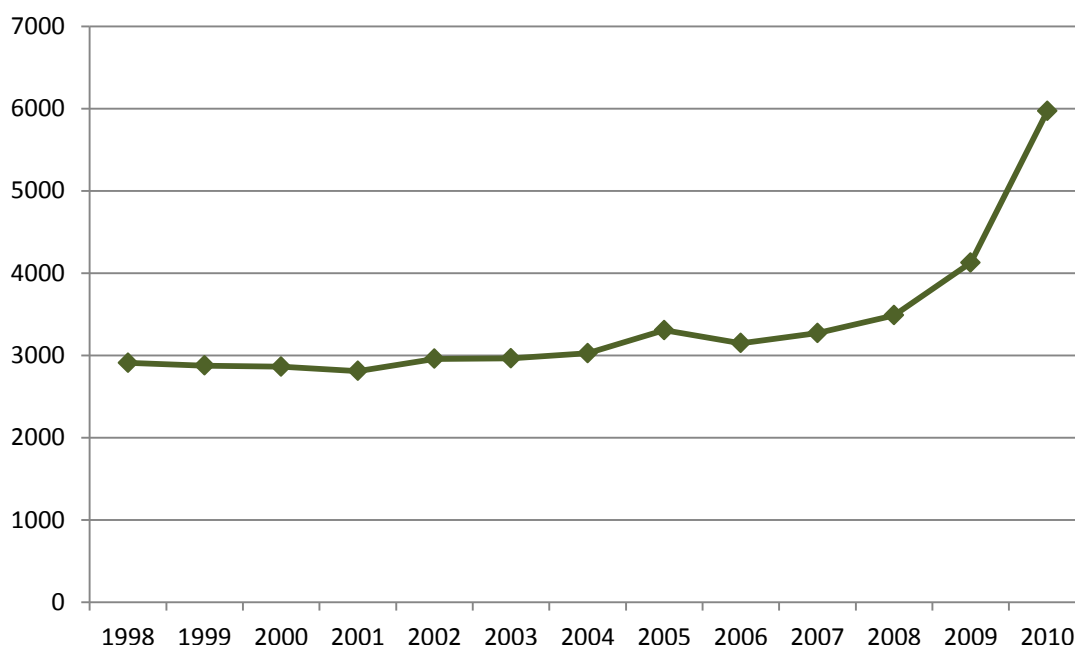
Secondly, the data highlights geographic specificities. The specific profile of Kandahar stands out in terms of access to education, because – Kabul aside – Kandahar is the only province with a relatively significant rate of drop out at the primary and secondary levels. This could be due to security, as well as internal displacements, that may have occurred during the primary and secondary school aged-years.

The data suggests that many young people are extremely keen on pursuing their education through university level degrees and are unlikely to drop out once they reach this level. The tipping point seems to occur at the primary school level, where dropout rates are the highest. Past that level, drop outs decrease with the level of education – a trend that can be encouraged through targeted policy making. Education is considered to be one of the few vehicles for escaping poverty and getting employment.

### c. Studying Abroad and Funding

Studying abroad was highlighted as an aspiration for many youth interviewed. For now, the objective is that of going abroad to study but coming back to Afghanistan to work after finishing the course. However, in light of political and economic challenges, this might soon change – if opportunities and funding allow. Indeed, national figures show that over the past ten years the number of Afghan students studying abroad has been steadily increasing.<sup>46</sup>

**Graph 11 - Students from Afghanistan studying abroad**



Source - UNESCO Institute for Statistics

<sup>46</sup> UNESCO Institute for Statistics, [http://data.un.org/Data.aspx?d=UNESCO&f=series%3AED\\_FSOABS](http://data.un.org/Data.aspx?d=UNESCO&f=series%3AED_FSOABS)

The survey did reveal a small number of people who had gone abroad for the specific objective of getting an education - **only 3 respondents out of 2658 interviews**. This finding may point to a lack of educational investment outside of Afghanistan by the international community – providing education in Afghanistan but not opening sufficiently large or accessible venues to seek education abroad. An additional 174 respondents had studied in neighbouring countries like Pakistan and Iran as refugees. The majority of those who had studied abroad were males living in urban areas.

Of all of the respondents who had studied in another country, only 5 had received scholarships from the Afghan government based in Herat, Kabul, Kunduz, Panjshir and Parwan. 5 others had received a scholarship from other institutions and governments of foreign countries. Of these, 2 respondents were based in Paktia whilst the rest in Kandahar, Nangarhar and Parwan. 87% (153/174) of those who had gone abroad had paid for it themselves or their families had paid for it. This again highlights that few scholarships are available for those wishing to study abroad.

#### d. Languages

Language proficiency is another angle to explore when considering youths in Afghanistan. Typically, the survey finds a clear divide between Dari and Pashto speaking areas. Thus, with the exception of the largely Pashtun provinces of Kandahar and Nangarhar, respondents are most likely to be ‘fluent’ or ‘intermediate’ in Dari in each of the surveyed provinces.

Given this divide, a more interesting indicator is to analyse the patterns of bilingualism (people who are fluent in both Dari and Pashto). This has implications for questions of local and regional identity and for the role that youths may be playing in shaping Afghan national identity. Bilingualism is lowest in Badakhshan (where geographic isolation plays a role), and highest in Nangarhar, which is located in the Pashtun East and near to the national administrative centre of Kabul. Kunduz also has a high level of bilingualism, which is likely a reflection of the varied ethnic groups therein.

**Table 2 - Percentage of respondents who are fluent in Dari and Pashto**

	Count	%	Base
<b>Badakhshan</b>	10	4.8	207
<b>Herat</b>	56	26.9	208
<b>Kabul</b>	198	27.8	713
<b>Kandahar</b>	38	18.2	209
<b>Kunduz</b>	88	41.9	210
<b>Balkh</b>	29	13.8	210
<b>Nangarhar</b>	102	49.0	208

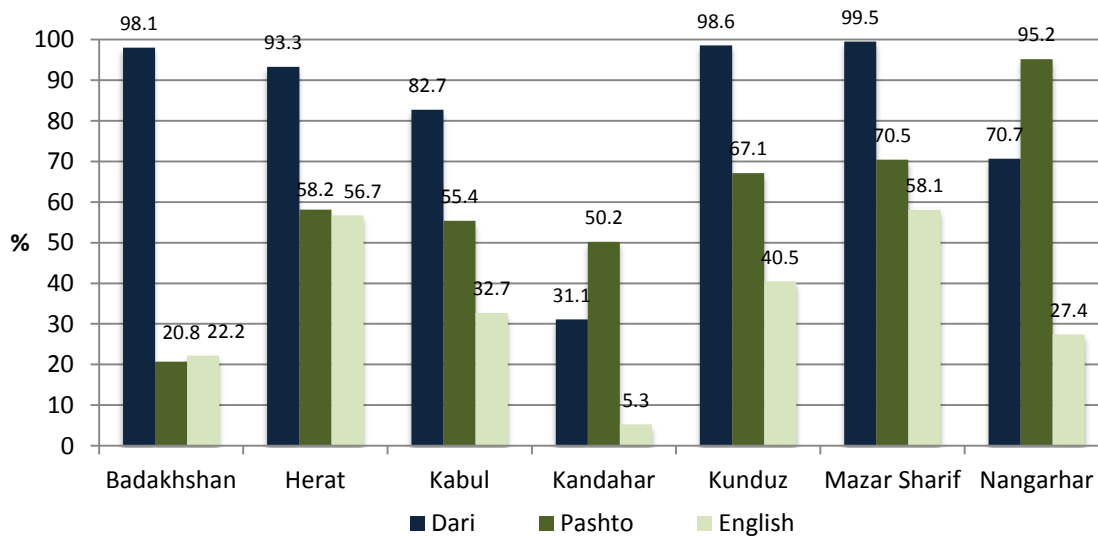
*Base: All respondents (n=1965)*

Interestingly, there are significant proportions of English-speakers in each of the surveyed areas. Even in a poor province like Badakhshan, approximately one fifth (22.2%) of young people say that they are ‘fluent’ or ‘intermediate’ in English. In Herat and Mazar Sharif, over half of respondents say that they are ‘fluent’ or ‘intermediate’ (56.7% and 58.1% respectively). If there is a risk of over-estimation of their own level by respondents, proficiency in English is an interesting trend to monitor



because it could have important implications for wider issues like access to and use of foreign media, engagement with the international community (both private companies and civil society organisations) and attitudes towards foreign involvement in Afghanistan. Even if respondents over estimate their own skills, this information shows their growing interest and ongoing efforts to learn English, which can then provide a strong enough support based for additional training and future English-language communications or career activities. Nationally, 49% of the population speaks Pashto, 77% speaks Dari and only 5% speaks English.

**Graph 12 - Respondents who report being 'fluent' or 'intermediate' in each language**



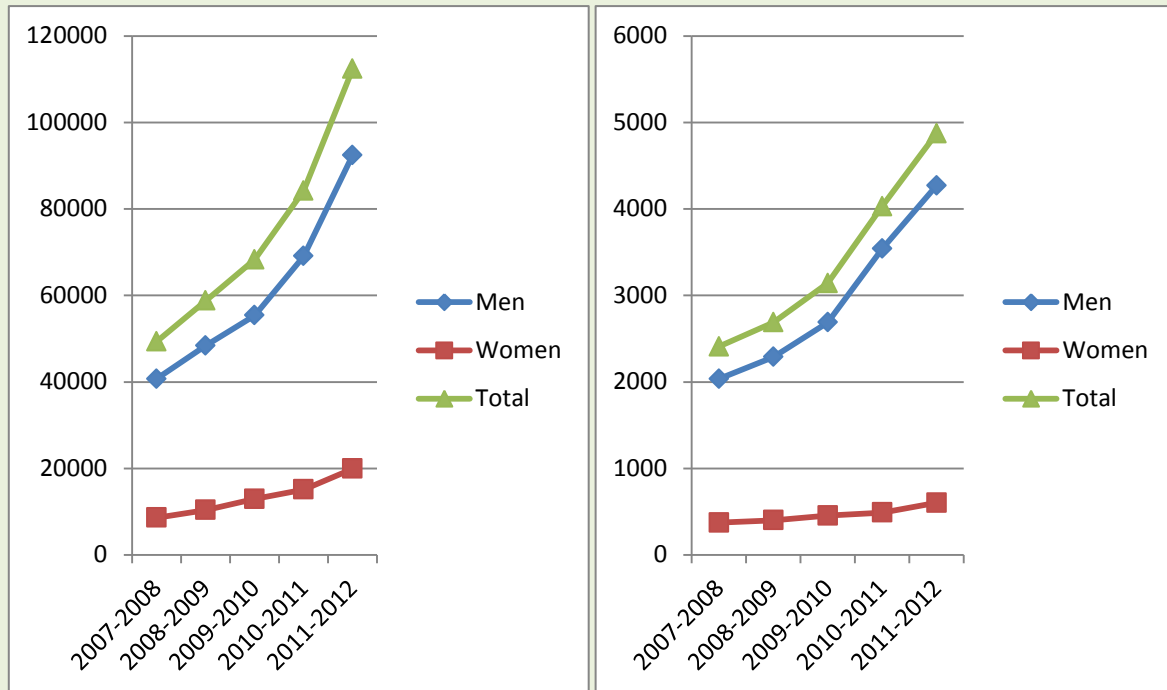
*Base: All respondents (n=1965)*

### Box 1 – Women and Higher Education

Many of the indicators of improvement in women’s education show progress over the past ten years. The numbers of female students and teachers have increased since 2005, and the male to female literacy ratio is greater for younger Afghans. Challenges remain: the graphs below highlight the less encouraging picture in tertiary education.

Graph 13 - # of students in higher education

Graph 14 - # of teachers in higher education



Source: Central Statistics Organization

While the overall numbers of female students and teachers have been increasing, they represent a consistently small portion of the overall numbers of students and teachers. This is particularly true at the university level (40% of primary school students were female in 2012, vs. 19% of university students)<sup>47</sup>.

These higher drop out rates from women can be attributed to several factors. The value of higher education for women in Afghanistan may not be apparent to their families. Additionally, cultural norms present a barrier: as women approach university age, they are more likely to be married and mothers, generally precluding them from attending school. Even engaged women may not be allowed to attend school, as they would then be in contact with more unrelated men. The lack of female professors described above may also be problematic, as many families only wish their daughters to be taught by other women<sup>48</sup>.

<sup>47</sup> CSO (2012), *Afghanistan Statistical Yearbook 2011-2012*, Central Statistics Organization, Kabul, p. 54

<sup>48</sup> ACBAR, p. 7

## 2.2 Economic Status & Employment

The services sector in Afghanistan will shrink after the 2014 withdrawal. We ask: *how will a radically rebalanced economy address the employment expectations of a new generation?* Currently, it does not. Up to 700,000 young people complete secondary school each year, but a weak economy leads to vulnerable employment and many young people are forced to work in unpaid positions with no job security<sup>49</sup>. If there are no jobs in Afghanistan, ambitious young people may seek opportunities in foreign countries.

### KEY SURVEY FINDINGS

- With a limited number of career options, **Afghanistan is not an attractive labour market for young people**. The level of employment among respondents is low: only 28.7% mentioned having one or more jobs, with significant differences across provinces surveyed and gender. Kandahar, Herat and Kabul have the highest levels of employment for young males.
- **Youth employment is characterized by a high level of job insecurity, low quality of employment and difficult labour market transition** - only 23.5% of the youths in the surveyed provinces who have a job said that they had salaried employment.
- Young people surveyed secure jobs in urban-based service roles like retail trade, construction and education, rather than agricultural employment. Consequently, **employment in the sample surveyed is higher in urban areas (31.7%) than rural areas (23.5%)**. However, the public sector remains the main provider of employment to young Afghan women.
- The growing appeal of the services sector leaves the Afghan workforce vulnerable to high levels of unemployment should the services ‘bubble’ collapse post-2014.
- **Young people surveyed have limited access to information about job opportunities**. Three quarters (74%) get career information from their families and friends, which promotes nepotism, restricts career options and limits economic diversification.

#### NATIONAL STATISTICS

- **Youth** under the age 25 show a **higher rate of unemployment** than the population overall (7%): 10% for men and 15% for women<sup>50</sup>
- This figure rises to 45% if the inactive population is taken into account<sup>51</sup>
- **75%** of employed women work as “unpaid family workers<sup>52</sup>”

Table 3 – Unemployment by gender and province  
Unemployed

<sup>49</sup> Samuel Hall Consulting/ILO (2012), *Time to move to Sustainable Jobs: Study on the State of Employment*, June 2012. See also Samuel Hall (2011), *Commercial Law Needs Assessment*, commissioned by GIZ in May 2011; Samuel Hall (2011) *Economic Assessment and Labour Market Survey of Balkh, Baghlan, Kandahar, and Kunduz*, commissioned by Mercy Corps in November 2011; with, respectively, samples of 621 medium-sized companies (in Balkh, Kunduz, Takhar, and Badakhshan) and 1350 employers and employees from the main urban centers of Balkh, Kunduz, Baghlan, and Kandahar provinces.

<sup>50</sup> NRVA 2007/8, p. 27-28

<sup>51</sup> NB: our survey design did not distinguish between inactive and unemployed in the same fashion.

NRVA 2007/8, p. 26

<sup>52</sup> NRVA 2007/8, p.32

	Male	Female	Total
Badakhshan	86.6%	91.3%	88.9%
Herat	13.5%	98.8%	56.1%
Kabul	54.1%	83.6%	68.9%
Kandahar	14.5%	97.6%	56.0%
Kunduz	80.2%	89.3%	84.7%
Balkh	60.2%	71.8%	65.9%
Nangarhar	71.2%	93.9%	82.5%

- The **Afghan labour market is unable to absorb the rising numbers of educated young people**, or to meet their career expectations. Only 28.7% of surveyed youths were employed. Badakhshan and Kunduz exhibit markedly higher unemployment rates (88.9% and 84.7%, respectively).
- Women are much less likely to find employment than men. **39.2% of men are employed compared to only 10.2% of women**. In conservative provinces such as Kandahar the figure drops to 2.4%.

## Levels of youth employment

As shown in table 3.1, **the level of employment of young Afghans in the surveyed provinces is low as only 28.7% of respondents mentioned having one or more jobs**. Yet, the differences across provinces and gender are significant.

Table 4 - Level of employment / province & gender

	Employed			Unemployed		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
Badakhshan	13.4%	8.8%	11.6%	86.6%	91.3%	88.9%
Herat	60%	1.2%	36.5%	13.5%	98.8%	56.1%
Kabul	41.2%	14.6%	30.7%	54.1%	83.6%	68.9%
Kandahar	77%	2.4%	47.4%	14.5%	97.6%	56.0%
Kunduz	19.8%	10.7%	16.2%	80.2%	89.3%	84.7%
Balkh	37.1%	28.2%	33.8%	60.2%	71.8%	65.9%
Nangarhar	28.8%	6%	24.7%	71.2%	93.9%	82.5%

Of particular note from this table:

- Kandahar, Herat and Kabul have the highest levels of employment for young males. Kunduz and Badakhshan provinces on the other hand are characterized by the lowest levels of employment among young people in the 7 surveyed provinces. This is relatively unsurprising as Afghanistan's main cities have been characterized by significant economic growth supported by the rise of a typically urban service economy, a sector of the economy for which young people may be better equipped than previous generations. In particular, these cities have also benefited from a booming construction sector over the past years, supported by the internationally-funded reconstruction of the country. Over the past decade, the Afghan agriculture sector on the other hand has been characterized by a stagnation and repeated episodes of drought in the North, which explains why more rural provinces like Kunduz and Badakhshan fare worse in terms of youth employment. This is confirmed by the comparison between levels of employment of urban youths and rural youths. In the 7 provinces at stake here, 31.7% of urban youths had a job as against 23.5% in rural areas. While the NRVA data does show higher rates of

employment in rural areas, this can be accounted for in part by the fact that it does not differentiate between employment and underemployment in these figures – and underemployment is more frequent in rural areas.<sup>53</sup>

- The overall level of employment of young women presents important differences across provinces, with the level of female employment at 2.4% in Kandahar compared to 28.2% in Balkh, findings that are not surprising given the cultural differences that characterize these two provinces. The fact that Herat fares as one of the worst cities among the ones surveyed for this study for young female employment with only 1.2% of the female respondents having one or more jobs may be explained by the age structure and level of school attendance of respondents there as most female respondents (68 out of 83) were below 18 in Herat.

Other determinants are to be considered when analysing the access to employment of young Afghans, namely age and education. Logically, the level of employment depends on the age of respondents, with under-18 being less likely to be employed than the 23-24 year-old Afghans surveyed for the purpose of this study, of which 54.3% were employed. Furthermore, 71.9% of the young Afghans who did not have a job were attending some forms of education (from primary school to university), with the majority (68.4%) attending high school. Yet, the correlation between education and unemployment must be considered carefully as young Afghans have sometimes no other choice than to prioritize education over employment when they cannot find employment.

## Characterizing employment of the youths

### 2.1.1.1. Sectors of Employment

Table 5 - Sector of Employment of employed young Afghans by Province<sup>54</sup>

Province	Agriculture	Construction	Manufacturing	Retail trade	Education	Health
Badakhshan (n=26)	7.7%	0%	3.8%	7.7%	11.5%	3.8%
I (n=76)	6.6%	3.9%	25%	36.8%	6.6%	3.9%
Kabul (n=238)	5.5%	12.2%	5.5%	18.9%	10.1%	4.2%
Kandahar (n=104)	3.8%	53.8%	1%	13.5%	0%	0%
Kunduz (n= 35)	5.7%	0%	28.6%	20.0%	5.7%	2.9%
Balkh (n=69)	5.8%	2.9%	10.1%	24.6%	23.2%	5.8%
Nangarhar (n=43)	4.7%	4.7%	14.0%	37.2%	11.6%	0%

Table 5 confirms the tendency for young Afghans to move away from the agricultural sector towards service-related employments. In particular, **it appears that retail trade, construction and education are three sectors where young Afghans manage to secure jobs.** In Herat and Kunduz respectively 25% and 28.6% of employed youths surveyed for this study work in the manufacturing sector. Herat is one of the only provinces where substantial investments in the industrial sector have been made over the past decade, supporting dynamic marble and plastic sectors, which could explain the

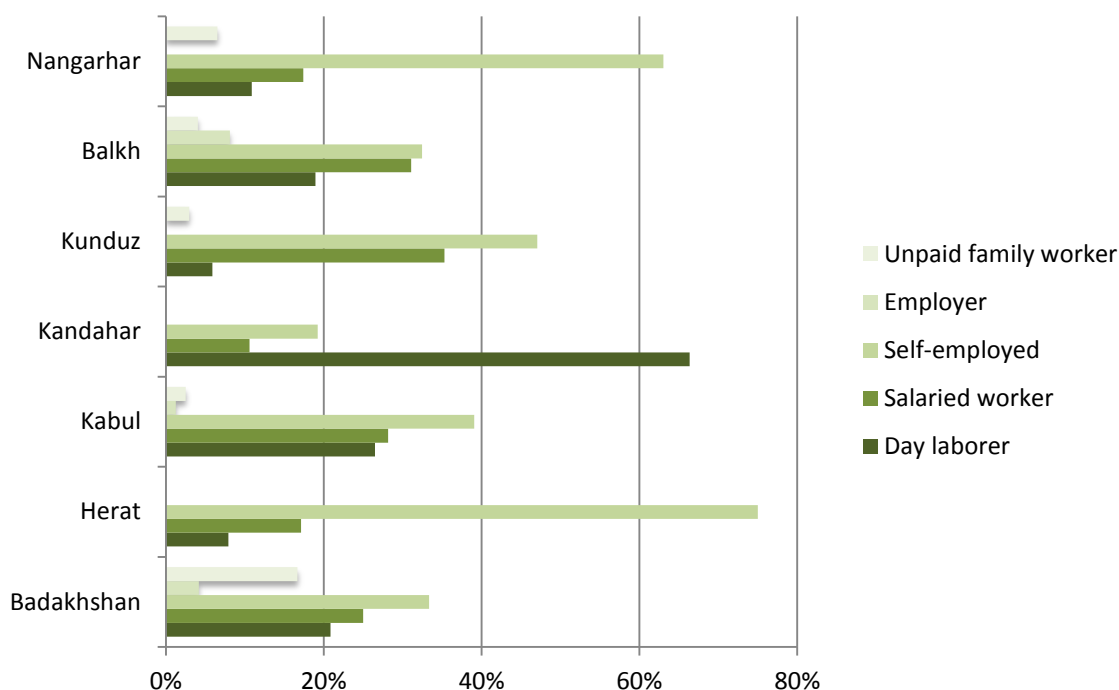
<sup>53</sup> The World Bank and GoIRA Ministry of Economy (2010), *Poverty Status in Afghanistan, A Profile Based on National Risk and Vulnerability Assessment*, Kabul, p. 44

<sup>54</sup> These figures represent the proportion of each sector for **employed** youths in each province.

particular profile of youth employment in this province. These findings are further supported by Samuel Hall’s 2011 *Economic Assessment and Labour Market Survey of Mazar-i-Sharif, Pul-I Khumri, Kandahar City and Kunduz City* (commissioned by Mercy Corps). The survey found that the respondents in Kunduz City reported 41.5% of household income as coming from wholesale and retail trade and 27.7% as coming from the manufacturing sector<sup>55</sup>. More than 70% of the respondents were aged between 15 and 34.

### 2.1.1.2. Status in employment

Graph 15 - Employment status by province



As illustrated by Graph 15, **youth employment is characterized by a high level of job insecurity, low quality of employment and difficult labour market transition - only 23.5% of the youths in the surveyed provinces who have a job said that they had salaried employment.** The majority of employed youth were either a) self-employed (41.4%); b) daily labourers (27.5%), and c) unpaid family workers (3%) - all categories which are considered to be forms of vulnerable employment<sup>56</sup>.

In this, it must be noted that Afghan youths do not particularly diverge significantly from the rest of the Afghan population. The 2007/8 NRVA found that self-employment was the main status in employment across the country and that more than 91% of Afghan workers qualified as vulnerable workers. The survey found that **urban youths could access relatively more secure jobs than their rural counterparts**, with 25.4% of salaried workers amongst the employed youth in urban areas, as

<sup>55</sup> Samuel Hall (2011), *Economic Assessment and Labour Market Survey of Mazar-i-Sharif, Pul-I Khumri, Kandahar City and Kunduz City* (commissioned by Mercy Corps), p. 79

<sup>56</sup> ILO defines as vulnerable employment “informal work arrangements and insecure employment leading to unstable earnings and (...) lack of safety nets”. See *NRVA 2007/8*, p.31

against 20.1% for their rural counterparts. Youth living in rural areas were more likely to work as unpaid family workers than those living in urban areas: 5.6% as against 1.3%. This is unsurprising as administrative jobs, in education or health sectors for example, are more easily accessible in urban centres.

#### Box 2 – Working Female Youth

As noted above, the overall level of employment of young female Afghans is considerably lower than their male counterparts (10.2% compared to 39.6% across the 7 main Afghan provinces). In the provinces surveyed for this study, the main sectors accessible for young Afghan women are a) education (42% of employed women in these provinces); b) public administration (13%); c) health (11%) and d) beauty parlours (11%). This shows that **the public sector remains the main provider of employment to young Afghan women but that this has yet to trickle down to the private sector, which remains impervious to female employment.**

**Young women were more likely to access salaried employment in the 7 provinces** under review here, as 58% of the employed young women captured by this survey declared being salaried workers. This is linked to the type of sector in which young women are more likely to find employment – i.e. public administration – where job security is higher than in other sectors. On average, women work 33 hours per week in summer, and 28 hours per week in winter. This finding differs quite significantly from national data on women’s status in employment, as the NRVA found that 75% of employed women were ‘unpaid family workers’ (thus presumably working longer hours and not earning money). It indicates a positive dynamic with young Afghan women being increasingly able to access more secure employment, especially in urban settings.

## Personal Monthly Incomes

Table 6 - Average income among employed youth (by province and type of location)

	URBAN AREAS		RURAL AREAS	
	Summer	Winter	Summer	Winter
Badakhshan	5458 AFS	5458 AFS	5900 AFS	5800 AFS
Herat	5516 AFS	4279 AFS	8924 AFS	8011 AFS
Kabul	8372 AFS	7295 AFS	8371 AFS	5648 AFS
Kandahar	9833 AFS	9660 AFS	9435 AFS	8978 AFS
Kunduz	7414 AFS	10067 AFS	6250 AFS	4682 AFS
Balkh	6469 AFS	6285 AFS	9539 AFS	5191 AFS
Nangarhar	6763 AFS	6506 AFS	7917 AFS	7750 AFS
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>7118 AFS</b>	<b>7081 AFS</b>	<b>8048 AFS</b>	<b>6580 AFS</b>

Amongst the employed youths, **the survey found significant differences of income and, more importantly of stability of income, across provinces.** Whilst Kandahar presents the highest level of youth income across the board, it is also characterized by less seasonal variations or differences between urban and rural areas. This can be explained by the fact that construction is the main



source of income accessible to youths in Kandahar and that this sector is subjected to relatively less seasonal variations. The youths' average income in other provinces, Kunduz in particular, presents significantly higher levels of variability between seasons. More generally, youths employed in rural areas have to face higher levels of seasonal variability in their income: as shown by table 3.3, winter means on average a reduction of 0.5% of income in urban areas as against a drop of 18% for rural areas.

Yet, in order to measure the economic status of youth and the impact that employment may have on their decision-making and role in the family, it is necessary to measure the economic contribution of youths to the household income. We therefore calculated the average contribution to the household income per province for all the youths surveyed for this study on the one hand and for the employed youth on the other hand. As shown by table 3.4 below, a) overall, **youths between the age of 15 and 25 contribute only marginally to the household income**; b) unsurprisingly, when employed, youths represent an important source of revenues for their household; c) youths surveyed in Kandahar seem to assume earlier a greater role in the economic role in their household:

Table 7 - Contribution of youths to household income

PROVINCE	All youths	Employed youths
Badakhshan	3.5%	38.7%
Herat	15.3%	58.8%
Kabul	15.0%	58.2%
Kandahar	21.6%	68.7%
Kunduz	3.3%	58.1%
Balkh	11.6%	47.8%
Nangarhar	7.0%	52.4%

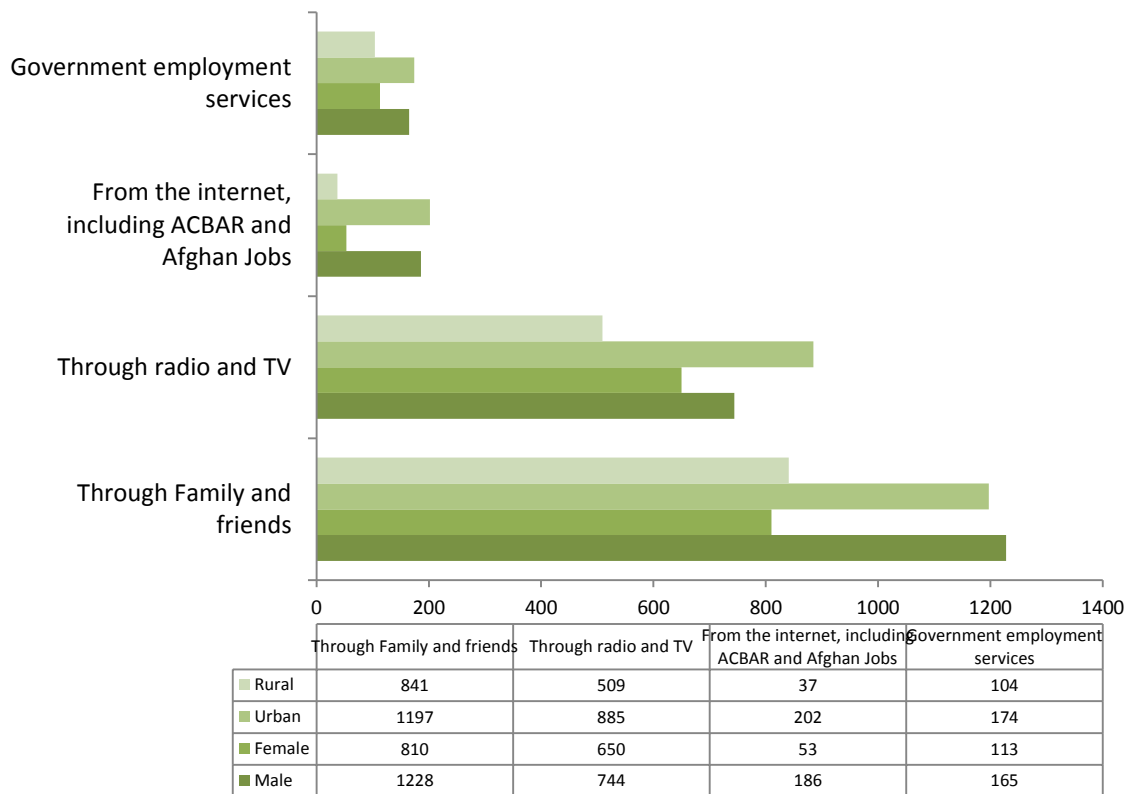
The survey showed that the average size of the household is 7, in line with average statistics regarding Afghan household composition<sup>57</sup>, which raises the question of the status of youths within households, from a source of burden to a source of income. If the survey shows that in a large majority of cases, for Afghan youths between the age of 15 and 25, the father remains the main – and often the only – source bread-winner in the family, youths still represent an important labour resource and insurance for later life when the parents become too old to work themselves. This is particularly important in a country that lacks any kind of reliable government social security. Indeed, and perhaps surprisingly, the survey found that only 14.7% of respondents in the 7 provinces surveyed for the study were married, whilst the majority of young respondents were still single (80.3%). The urban bias in the sampling may explain for the relatively low proportion of people who are married before the age of 25 but it is also a positive dynamic given that traditional practices of early marriage are widespread in some parts of the country. Overall, this shows that, at least in the 7 provinces analysed here, **young Afghans between the ages of 15 to 25 remain very much dependent on their family networks for subsistence.**

This is confirmed by the fact that the large majority of respondents in the 7 provinces at stake (74%), male and female and both in urban and rural areas said that they got information about available

<sup>57</sup> NRVA 2007/8, p. xviii

job vacancies in their areas through family and friends. Samuel Hall’s report *Understanding the Faizabad Labour Market Survey* suggest that these trends are reflective of the situation for those of all ages, albeit perhaps a little more family-dependent: 66.2% of employees had received used family, friends or a friend at the job as a recruitment channel<sup>58</sup>. The information available through family and friends will be limited to and contingent on families’ exposure to information. This tends to circumscribe youths’ opportunities to the ones that their family have access to, limiting the possibilities for youth to develop their own paths, different from those followed by their parents.

**Graph 16 - Sources of job vacancy information**



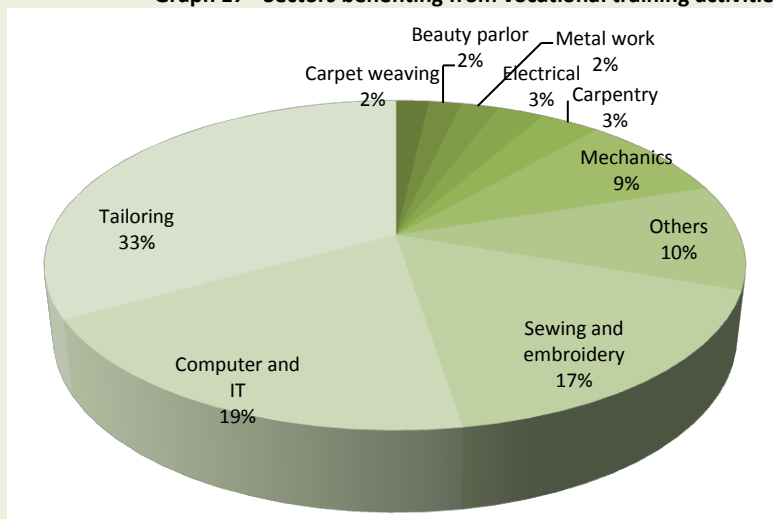
<sup>58</sup> Samuel Hall (2010), *Understanding the Faizabad Labour Market Survey*, commissioned by the University of Central Asia (UCA), Kabul, p. 26

### Box 3 – Vocational Training for the Youth

Whether literate or illiterate, vocational training has become a key feature of both international NGOs and the government’s Technical and Vocational Education Training (TVET) programme. The significance of vocational training for Afghan youth lies in the fact that it is a qualification that is not contingent on previous education and is directly targeted at acquiring an income generating activity.

Of the total respondents, 57.9% had not received vocational training whilst 42.1% had received training in various vocations. Of the 42.1% who had been trained, 31% were trained in tailoring, 18% in computer and IT, 16% were trained in sewing and embroidery. Graph 6 shows the percentages of people trained in various vocations.

**Graph 17 - Sectors benefiting from vocational training activities**



The international community in Afghanistan frequently implements vocational training programmes. However few conduct impact evaluations after the training period has been finished. Moreover, interviews with key stakeholders revealed that oftentimes, the vocations chosen to train people, are supply-based rather than demand-driven, and *if demand-driven*, mostly adapted to the profiles of elders. The survey results reveal that 61% of those who had received vocational training had been unable to find jobs, in majority the case for women.

**Table 8 - Respondents who have received vocational training**

	Total Trained		% Employed		% Unemployed	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Carpet weaving	9	15	0.7	0.9	0.9	1.6
Beauty parlour	1	22	0	1.8	0.1	2.1
Metal work	24	0	2.3	0	2.1	0
Electrical	31	2	5.3	0	1.2	0.3
Carpentry	41	1	5.5	0	2.5	0.1
Mechanics	98	6	12.2	0.9	6.6	0.3
Others	138	13	20.2	1.2	7.2	1.1
Sewing and embroidery	32	192	3	12.6	2.8	20.1
Computer and IT	130	124	13.8	5.7	10.1	14.5
Tailoring	122	305	17.2	14.7	6.9	35.3

## 2.3 Physical and Mental Health

Health indicators in Afghanistan are slowly improving, but youths are particularly vulnerable in two areas: mental and reproductive health. Mental health is poorly understood in Afghanistan and the health system is not equipped to identify or treat symptoms of mental problems. Poor reproductive health indicators are exacerbated by limited contraceptive use, a high fertility rate and limited access to health facilities, and are directly linked to levels of education.

### KEY SURVEY FINDINGS

- **The health sector is poorly equipped to deal with mental health problems.**
- Demand for mental health treatment exceeds the supply of trained doctors and mental health facilities. **More than half of surveyed youth think that they need psychological counselling or help**, although few receive it - 75% of young people interviewed in Kabul want counselling or support, but only 12% received any.
- There are **only 50 trained psychiatrists** in Afghanistan, and only 1% of doctors' training involves mental health<sup>65</sup>.
- **62% of women in Kabul have no information about reproductive health issues**, and still rely on their mothers for advice about sexual health – 1 in 5 women. Despite efforts, NGOs have had little impact: only 1% say that they received information on these issues from NGOs.
- Female health indicators are linked to levels of education – **better education results in better health behaviour**: fertility is lower, contraceptive use is higher and educated women are more likely to give birth with a skilled attendant present (figures provided in later section).
- Domestic commitments for women pose a conspicuous hurdle for accessing labour markets and attending education institutions. Women are more likely to have children than men at any given age – 55% of 22 year old women have had a child, compared to only 28% of men.

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- **10%** of young women between the ages of 15 and 19 **have already had a child**; an additional 4% are pregnant<sup>59</sup>
- The **fertility rate is high – 5.1**<sup>60</sup>
- 27% of married 20-24 year old women in rural areas and 18% of those in urban areas had a live birth by age 18<sup>61</sup>
- Just **36.4% of urban women and 18.4% of rural women reported using contraception**<sup>62</sup>.
- Only 27.7% of 15-24 year olds have heard of AIDS<sup>63</sup>
- 67.7% of people in mental health survey showed symptoms of depression<sup>64</sup>.

<sup>59</sup> *Afghanistan Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (2013)*, p. xxi

<sup>60</sup> *Afghanistan Mortality Survey 2010*, p. 40

<sup>61</sup> *Afghanistan Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (2013)*, p. 88

<sup>62</sup> *Afghanistan Mortality Survey 2010*, p. 57

<sup>63</sup> *Afghanistan Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (2013)*, p. 142

<sup>64</sup> 2002 CDC Mental Health Survey in Afghanistan, as reported in Cardozo, Barbara Lopes ; Bilukha, Oleg O.; Crawford, Carol A. Gotway; et al., *Mental Health, Social Functioning, and Disability in Postwar Afghanistan* JAMA. 2004;292(5):575-584, pp. 575, 578

<sup>65</sup> The World Health Organization (WHO) (2006), *WHO – AIMS Report on Mental Health System in Afghanistan, Kabul, Afghanistan*, p.2

## Reproductive Health

Many Afghans marry at a young age, especially women; as a result, reproductive health issues are particularly relevant to young Afghans. **Lack of information about reproductive health, comparatively high rates of adolescent pregnancy and lack of access to medical facilities combine to place youth, particularly young women, in a vulnerable health situation.**

Although there are more healthcare facilities than ever before, health infrastructure still falls short of demand, fertility rates are comparatively high, contraceptive use is low - less than 20% of married women use a modern family planning method<sup>66</sup> - and more than three quarters (76%) of women give birth without a skilled attendant.<sup>67</sup>

The National Risk and Vulnerability Assessment 2007/8, summarises the situation of healthcare as follows: “the recovery of Afghanistan’s health system from a collapse in the recent decades of conflict is reflected in improving outcome indicators – but still the country is at the very bottom of international rankings.”<sup>68</sup>

**One of the key issues is the poor access to information about reproductive health.** Outreach programmes, such as those implemented by UNFPA, aim to make youth ambassadors for change and awareness. They train young, educated Afghans to provide their own training to rural and urban youth in their local communities on reproductive health. Furthermore, the MoPH with the support of UNFPA established an anonymous Youth Health Line providing information, counselling and referral services regarding reproductive health and in the past supported Youth Information Centres (YICs), which have closed, with the exception for one YIC/UNFPA Centre operating in Kabul. UNICEF had also established Youth Information and Contact Centres (YICC) in several provinces – which are now closed. In Balkh alone, the YICC provided trainings in reproductive health to nearly one thousand youths aged 14 to 24.<sup>69</sup> While the success of such programmes is difficult to measure in the short-term, interviewees responded positively to the programme’s ability to spread information about reproductive health in the region.

Between August and December of 2012, the Ministry of Public Health instituted a Youth Health Line this is the same as mentioned above which young people could call to receive health counselling. The line received more than 2,500 calls per month during this time period and plans are underway to open lines in other major Afghan cities<sup>70</sup>.

In order to probe this area further, a focused survey among 100 women, between 15 and 25 years old, was conducted in Kabul.

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<sup>66</sup> *NRVA 2007/8*, p. 83

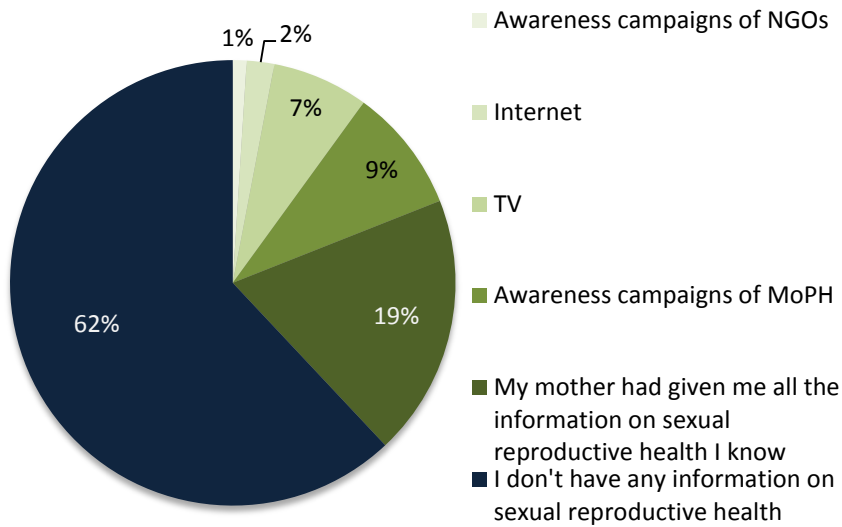
<sup>67</sup> *NRVA 2007/8*, p. 84

<sup>68</sup> *NRVA 2007/8*, p. 73

<sup>69</sup> Key Informant Interview with the director of the YICC, Balkh, Afghanistan

<sup>70</sup> UN Population Fund, “Youth health line 120, receives more than 120 calls”, 28 Aug. 2013, <http://reliefweb.int/report/afghanistan/youth-health-line-120-receives-more-7000-calls>

**Graph 18 - Sources of information about sexual and reproductive health**



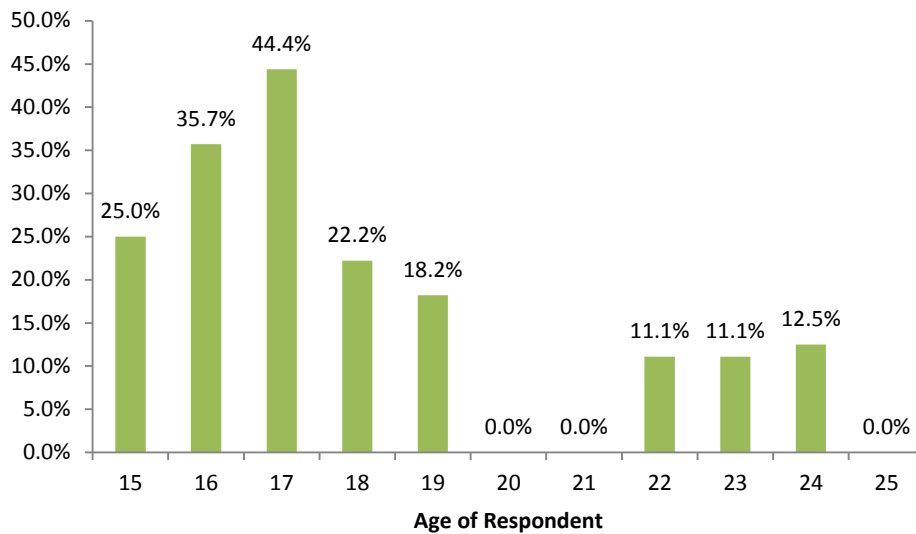
*Base: All respondents in Kabul women health survey (n=100)*

Respondents were asked how, if at all, they got information about sexual or reproductive health issues. **The results show that most young women in Kabul (62%) do not have any information about these issues at all.** This was particularly true for younger respondents (Graph 7). If the access to information on sexual or reproductive health issues is as low in the capital, it is fair to conclude that most young women will not have access to information at all in most parts of the country, especially in rural areas. More encouragingly, as many respondents received information from NGOs, Internet, TV and MoPH awareness campaigns combined (presumably more accurate) as did from their mothers. Transmission of information from one generation to the next perpetrates a risk of unsafe practices. The *2012-2016 National Reproductive Health Strategy*, recognizing the influence of family, actually calls for encouraging the participation of older women and mothers-in-law in community family planning activities<sup>71</sup>.

The findings do suggest that campaigns by NGOs appear to have made very little cut-through among respondents – only 1% say that they received information from NGO campaigns. Similarly, very few young women say that they got information about sexual and reproductive health from the Internet (2%). Interestingly, findings from the larger-scale provincial survey in Kabul, Balkh, Badakhshan, Herat, Kunduz, Kandahar and Nangarhar show that 11% of young women use the Internet, which suggests that this could be an underutilised means of conveying important messages about sexual and reproductive health.

<sup>71</sup> GoIRA (2011), *National Reproductive Health Strategy*, p. 19

**Graph 19 - Female respondents with no information on family planning**



The graph above highlights that the portion of respondents with no information on family planning skew towards the younger end of youth, which is concerning given the prevalence of teenage pregnancy.

Beyond education around these issues, actual use of the information presented should be considered. For example, **although 84.8% of Afghan women aged 15-19 and 91.7% of women aged 20-24 in 2010 had heard of a modern method of contraception, only 9% of the former and 15.9% of the latter reported actually using contraception**<sup>72</sup>. Breaking these rates down further by region, type of location and other factors will allow for identification of portions of the population to target for both educative and distributive family planning services. More generally, better education correlates with healthier behaviour: attendance of a skilled birth attendant during childbirth, knowledge and use of contraception, etc.

**Access to healthcare also needs improvement.** As mentioned, beyond the general lack of health care in more remote areas, cultural factors can make it more difficult for women in rural areas to have access to trained medical care. Only 30.5% of deliveries in rural areas are attended by skilled attendants, as compared to 74.3% of deliveries in urban areas<sup>73</sup>. When rural women go to provincial centers they may “face discrimination at health facilities, with language barriers and low levels of education in some areas compounding the problem<sup>74</sup>.”

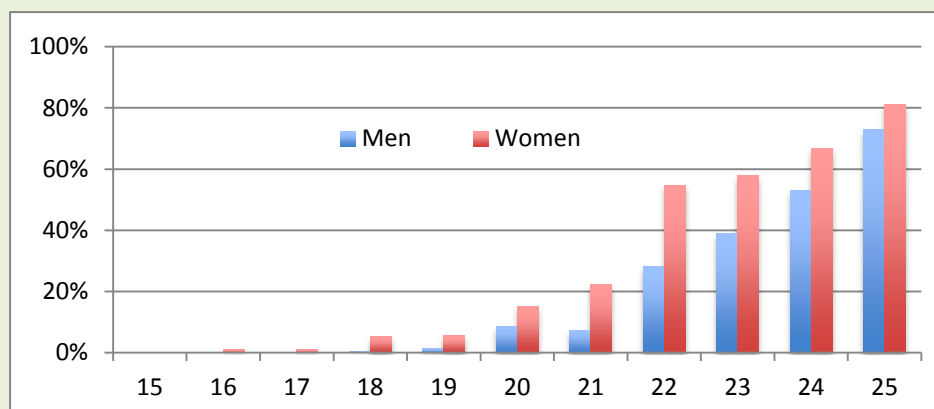
<sup>72</sup> *Afghanistan Mortality Survey 2010*, pp. 55-56

<sup>73</sup> *Afghanistan Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (2013)*, p. 97

<sup>74</sup> *Health and Education in Afghanistan: 10 years after – Quantity not Quality*, Kabul, p. 7



#### Box 4 –Adolescent pregnancy in Afghanistan



Graph 20 - % of respondents with children, by age and gender

The 2010-2011 *Afghanistan Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey* (AMICS) reported that 10% of young women between the ages of 15 and 19 had already had a child and an additional 4% were pregnant<sup>75</sup>. The most vulnerable of women tend to be those most likely to end up with children at a young age; wealth and education both correlate negatively to likelihood of having had children by age 24<sup>76</sup>.

**At every age, female respondents are more likely to have children than male respondents.** In addition to increasing vulnerability and decreasing employment prospects and further education pregnancy is dangerous to both mother and child<sup>77</sup>. Younger women's narrower pelvis and immature reproductive system lead to a higher mortality from childbirth<sup>78</sup>, and for those who survive other debilitating problems such as fistulas due to obstructed labour may present themselves<sup>79</sup>.

These difficulties are compounded by the conditions under which young women give birth. While men's awareness of the importance of women's healthcare has risen over the past ten years, they are still reluctant to allow their wives to see male doctors for maternity and gynaecological issues<sup>80</sup>. The demand for female doctors is three times the supply, and the ratio is worse for midwives and nurses<sup>81</sup>. Ten provinces in Afghanistan do not have any obstetricians or gynaecologists, and there are only 332 in the country as a whole<sup>82</sup>. Only 39.2% of births to women under 20 are attended by skilled attendants<sup>83</sup>.

<sup>75</sup> *Afghanistan Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey* (2013), p. xxi

<sup>76</sup> *Afghanistan Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey* (2013), p 81

<sup>77</sup> *Afghanistan Mortality Survey 2010*, pp. 42, 49

<sup>78</sup> Ministry of Public Health (2009), *National Child and Adolescent Health Strategy 2009-2013*, Kabul, p. 11

<sup>79</sup> UNFPA, *Annual Report 2010-2011*, p. 20

<sup>80</sup> ACBAR (2011), *Health and Education in Afghanistan: 10 years after – Quantity not Quality*, Kabul, p. 29

<sup>81</sup> ACBAR (2011), *Health and Education In Afghanistan: 10 years after, - Quantity not Quality*, Kabul, pp. 29-30

<sup>82</sup> Central Statistics Organization (2012) *Afghanistan Statistical Yearbook 2011-2012*, p.110

<sup>83</sup> Skilled attendants include doctors, nurse/midwife, and auxiliary midwife

*Afghanistan Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey* (2013), p. 97

## Mental Health

Mental health is one of the most underreported phenomena in the health sector and there are very few reliable statistics. In Afghanistan, **the framework for treating mental health is underdeveloped, which, given the likely prevalence of mental health problems (especially those associated with conflict, violence and displacement), is quite concerning.** A 2002 United States Center for Disease (CDC) national, cluster-based survey in Afghanistan (799 adult household members) found that 67.7% of non-disabled respondents exhibited symptoms of depression, 72.2% exhibited symptoms of anxiety, and 42% symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder. Women were significantly more likely to exhibit these symptoms<sup>84</sup>. 53% of these respondents were between the ages of 15 and 34. While this report is now over ten years old, it serves to highlight the need for mental health services among Afghans overall, corroborating our research among Afghan youth. A 2006 survey of 1011 Afghan children (between the ages of 11 and 16) found that the portion of students “meeting criteria for a probable psychiatric disorder” was twice that expected for this age group, while two-thirds of children had experienced a “traumatic event”<sup>85</sup>.

The need for mental health professionals and facilities for Afghans overall and youth in particular is clear. However, according to the Central Statistics Office in 2011-2012 there were only 50 psychiatrists in Afghanistan, of whom 44 were in Kabul<sup>86</sup>, and less than 1% of doctors’ training is devoted to mental health issues<sup>87</sup>. With few trained psychiatrists or mental health practitioners, diagnosing mental health problems remains a significant challenge – therefore figures pertaining to the number of mental health cases may not provide an accurate picture of mental illness and should be treated with caution. In a country riven by conflict for more than three decades, the question of mental health and psychological trauma of young generations represents a major challenge that is likely to influence the future of healthcare development in Afghanistan.

Respondents in Kabul, Balkh, Badakhshan, Herat, Kunduz, Kandahar and Nangarhar were asked whether they think they need psychological counselling or help. Graph 2.2 shows that the **overall demand for psychological support is high with more than half of the respondents thinking that they need it in each of the above-mentioned provinces.**

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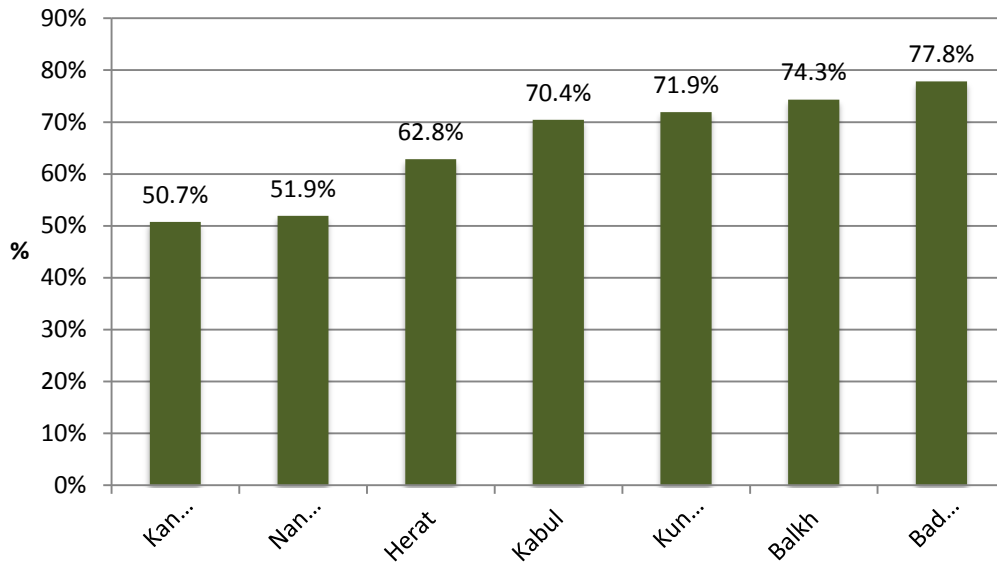
<sup>84</sup> 2002 CDC Mental Health Survey in Afghanistan, as reported in Cardozo, Barbara Lopes ; Bilukha, Oleg O.; Crawford, Carol A. Gotway; et al., *Mental Health, Social Functioning, and Disability in Postwar Afghanistan* JAMA. 2004;292(5):575-584, pp. 575, 578

<sup>85</sup> Panter-Brick, C. and Eggerman, M. and Gonzalez, V. and Safdar, S. (2009) “Violence, suffering, and mental health in Afghanistan : a school based survey”, *The Lancet.*, 374 (9692), p. 816

<sup>86</sup> CSO (2012), *Afghanistan Statistical Yearbook 2011-2012*, p. 118

<sup>87</sup> The World Health Organization (WHO) (2006), *WHO – AIMS Report on Mental Health System in Afghanistan*, Kabul, Afghanistan, p.2

**Graph 21 - Proportion of respondents who think that they need psychological or counseling support**

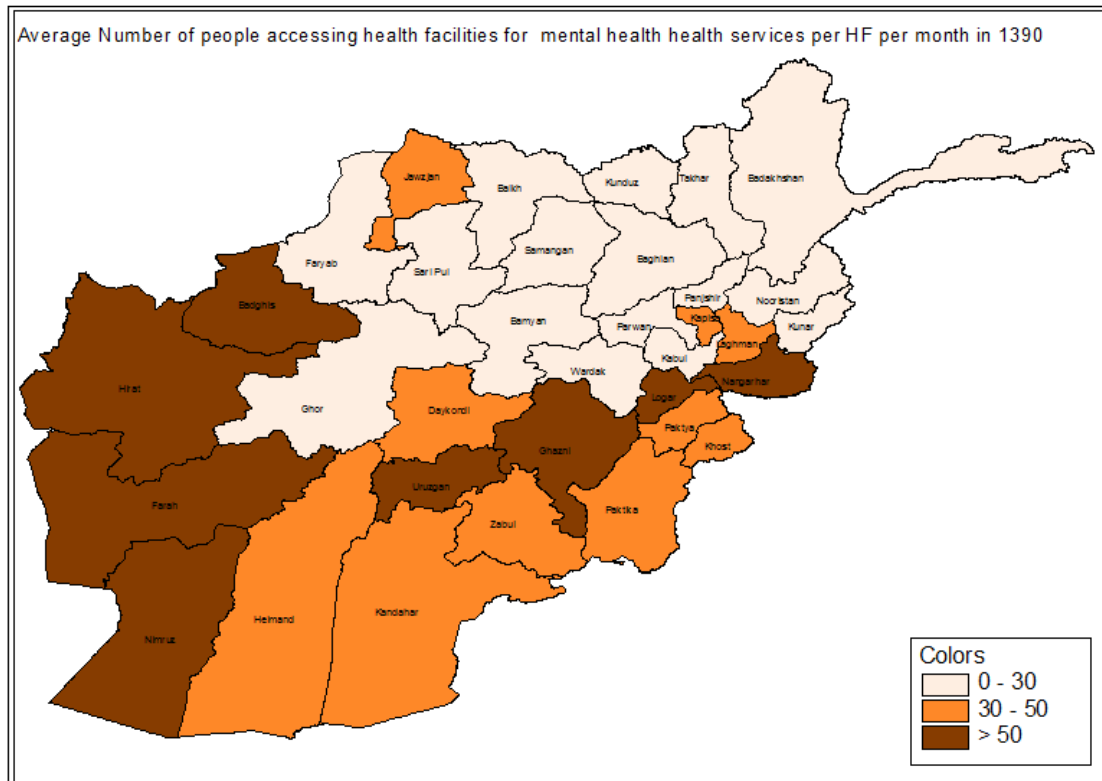


*Base: All respondents in Kabul, Balkh, Badakhshan, Herat, Kunduz, Kandahar and Nangarhar, minus 7 interviewer mistakes (n=1958)*

Young people in the Pashtun provinces of Kandahar and Nangarhar are the least likely to say that they need psychological counselling or help. This may be related to cultural reservations, perceptions of mental health illnesses and a reluctance to share private matters outside the familial sphere among strongly traditional communities.

Conversely, unpublished data from the Ministry of Health's Health Management Information System (HMIS) show that mental health facilities in Nangarhar have among the highest number of visits per month (more than 50) compared to other provinces. In a similar vein, mental health clinics in Kandahar are more likely to receive visits from patients than clinics in Kabul, Balkh or Badakhshan. Given the notable difference between the proportion of young people in Balkh and Badakhshan, especially, who say that they need psychological or counselling support, and the number of people who actually access health facilities for mental services, there appears to be a gap between supply and demand in these areas.

Figure 1 – Average # of people accessing health facilities for mental health



Source – Ministry of Public Health HMIS unpublished data. Base: Unknown

This issue was explored in greater detail in the focused health survey of young women in Kabul. The findings corroborate data collected in the other surveyed provinces. While three quarters (75%) of respondents in Kabul feel that they need psychological counselling or help, only 12% say that they have received any psychological or counselling support from a community worker, social worker or other professional from any organisation.

## Drug Use

As with mental health issues, there is comparatively little available data about the prevalence of drug use in Afghanistan, while drug production and trade is known to be one of the highest in the world. **Researching such a sensitive and taboo topic poses distinct challenges as interviewees may be reluctant to give honest answers or even to discuss the topic. Drug use is looked down upon in Afghanistan<sup>88</sup>, and addicts may not want to admit to it: there is a high risk of under-reporting of drug use among respondents and so data on drug use needs to be treated with caution.** Data relating to women and children is more likely to be low given the difficulties in interviewing women<sup>89</sup>.

A 2009 UNODC survey on drug use in Afghanistan warned that illicit drug use, particularly the use of opium, was on the rise. Between 2005 and 2009, the population of regular opium users in Afghanistan grew by 53%. During the same time period, the population of regular heroin users grew by 140%. Nearly 10% of the adult population, aged 15 to 64, was identified as a drug user, and

<sup>88</sup> Abou, Georges (2012), “Le combat sans fin contre la drogue en Afghanistan”, Radio France Internationale, 17 feb. 2012, <http://www.rfi.fr/asi-pacifique/20120216-drogu-combat-sans-fin>

<sup>89</sup> UNODC exec summary p. 4

approximately 694,000 Afghans required treatment due to excessive drug use; this was particularly true in areas where opium and cannabis production were high.<sup>90</sup> A US State Department 2010 survey on drug use in Afghanistan confirms the UNODC data, reporting a drug use of 10.6% among urban adult males<sup>91</sup>. The Ministry of Public Health estimates drug addicts in Kabul number approximately 17,000.<sup>92</sup> Other figures place Kabul's addict number at 60,000.<sup>93</sup> Another survey found that 7% of addicts had HIV, leaving Afghanistan open to an epidemic like some of its neighbours<sup>94</sup>.

The UNODC 2009 Drug Use Survey found that cannabis is the most commonly used drug, followed by opium and heroin<sup>95</sup>. Their popularity is influenced by their zones of production: "the highest prevalence of drug use is found in Northern and Southern regions<sup>96</sup>." Drug users are most likely to be unemployed (or poor), uneducated, and male<sup>97</sup>. Drug use patterns for young women are similar to those of young men, albeit at lower rates<sup>98</sup>. Use of cannabis should be of particular concern to youth policy makers as cannabis users tend to start at around 18-19 years old – younger than, heroin users who begin on average at 24.

An additional area of concern for youth policy makers is the high rate of drug use among children in Afghanistan. Around 300,000 Afghan children are believed to be addicted to drugs. This addiction stems from two things: 1) passive drug use, as parents smoke around children and 2) active drug use. Opium is traditionally used both as a medicine and to keep children calm, especially in the north of the country<sup>99</sup>. In the north and south of Afghanistan, as many as 50% of drug users give their children opium – leaving part of the population addicted prior to ever reaching adolescence<sup>100</sup>.

Outreach programmes informing the public about drug use and addiction and treatment centres are increasing, but demand still far outstrips supply<sup>101</sup>. In its 2012-2016 *National Drug Demand Reduction Policy*, the government states that the 50 drug centres in the country treat about 10,000 people annually, while the WHO believes that 20% of addicts need this treatment<sup>102</sup>. Few programs today seem to target youth specifically, leaving the country's youth vulnerable to addiction. The government does recognize this: the NDDR Policy recommends the prioritization of vulnerable groups such as children in youth in treatment programs<sup>103</sup>.

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<sup>90</sup> UNODC (2009), *Drug Use in Afghanistan: 2009 Survey*

<sup>91</sup> U.S. Department of State (2012), *Afghanistan National Urban Drug Use Survey*, Research brief, p. 1

<sup>92</sup> *MoPH Opens 200-bed Addicts Treatment Center in Kabul City*, 23 Feb 2012, Ministry of Public Health, <http://moph.gov.af/en/news/7208>.

<sup>93</sup> This estimate was sourced at the Director of the Nejat Centre, Tariq Sulaiman. The full citation can be found here: *Afghanistan: Kabul drug addictions running out of hope*, 30 Aug 2009, IRIN, <http://www.irinnews.org/Report/85920/AFGHANISTAN-Kabul-drug-addicts-running-out-of-hope>.

<sup>94</sup> Lavender, L. (2011), *Youth Bulge in Afghanistan*, p. 3

<sup>95</sup> UNODC 2009 Drug survey executive summary, p. 14

<sup>96</sup> UNODC 2009 Drug executive summary p. 9

<sup>97</sup> UNODC 2009 Drug executive summary p. 9

<sup>98</sup> UNODC, *Drug use and adolescent girls for UNRT Draft*, p. 2, UNODC 2009 Drug executive summary p. 11

<sup>99</sup> AFP (2013), "Afghanistan: les enfants drogués, victims innocentes de la culture de l'opium," *Le Point*, 11 feb. 2013, [http://www.lepoint.fr/monde/afghanistan-les-enfants-drogues-victimes-innocentes-de-la-culture-de-l-opium-11-02-2013-1626102\\_24.php](http://www.lepoint.fr/monde/afghanistan-les-enfants-drogues-victimes-innocentes-de-la-culture-de-l-opium-11-02-2013-1626102_24.php)

<sup>100</sup> UNODC 2009 Drug executive summary p. 3

<sup>101</sup> IRIN (2009), "A Kaboul les toxicomanes perdent espoir," 1 sept. 2009,

<http://www.irinnews.org/fr/report/85948/afghanistan-a-kaboul-les-toxicomanes-perdent-espoir>

<sup>102</sup> GoIRA, *2012-2016 Drug Demand Reduction Policy*, pp. 5, 13

<sup>103</sup> NDDRP p. 24

## 2.4 Access to media & means of communication

Afghan youths are voracious consumers of modern mobile and internet technology and actively participate in online communities and membership groups. The growing use of modern media – especially among the urban youth – provides a powerful channel for communication both to spread information about careers and healthcare, and to widen youth networks. However, the poor penetration of internet coverage in rural areas means that many young people will not be reached by these communication initiatives.

### KEY SURVEY FINDINGS

- **Mobile phone use is high** in urban (96%) and rural (93%) areas, **but internet use varies significantly** by location – 51% urban and 24% rural.
- Young people are much more likely to access the internet than the previous generations – 18.3% compared to 7.2%.
- Internet users are active on social networking sites - 71% of internet users access Facebook.
- ‘Political’ Facebook groups are popular - “Afghanistan” has 24244 members, “Afghan youth movement for national unity,” 2304, “Anti-corruption movement of Afghanistan,” 2571.
- The internet is also used heavily for news (47%), e-mail (43%) and for online chatting (30%).
- However, **the spread of internet use is still an urban phenomenon**. Internet use in rural areas remains very low among men and women. In Badakhshan 11% of young men and 2.5% of young women access the internet, which severely limits the transmission and flow of information into rural hinterlands.
- **Gender differences in internet usage are notable – 23% of men and 11% of women access the internet**. The differences are particularly pronounced in Kunduz (39%:17%), Balkh (33%:17%) and Kandahar (5%:0%).

Providing information about healthcare to young women could be better achieved through television and radio, as young women spend more time listening to radio and watching television than young men (30.5% and 42.3% vs. 17.8% and 31.4%, respectively).

### NATIONAL STATISTICS

- **17.1 million** mobile subscribers and 1.08 million internet users in Afghanistan in 2012<sup>104</sup>
- **7.2%** of the population access the **internet**<sup>105</sup>
- **85%** of the population live within mobile coverage areas<sup>106</sup>
- **80%** of Afghans own a radio, **71%** own a mobile, **52%** a television and **12%** a computer<sup>107</sup>
- Television usage is higher in urban areas than rural (91% vs. 38%)<sup>108</sup>
- Young people almost **trust TV as much as mullahs** on religious issues – 29% and 35% respectively<sup>109</sup>

<sup>104</sup> USAID and Internews (2012), *The State of Telecommunications and Internet in Afghanistan – Six Years Later (2006-2012)*, p. 9

<sup>105</sup> Ministry of Communication and Information Technology: <http://mcit.gov.af/Content/images/Eng%20-%20Internet%20Users.png>

<sup>106</sup> USAID (2012), “Apps for Afghanistan”, *Frontlines*, Sept-Oct. 2011, <http://www.usaid.gov/news-information/frontlines/youth-mobile-technology/apps-afghanistan>

<sup>107</sup> Asia Foundation (2012), *Afghanistan in 2012: a survey of the Afghan people (2012)*, p. 171

<sup>108</sup> Asia Foundation (2012), *Afghanistan in 2012: a survey of the Afghan people (2012)*, pp. 172-173

<sup>109</sup> Altai Consulting (2010), *Afghan Media in 2010*, p. 145

## Access to communication technologies

Table 9 compares the findings of this survey in 7 provinces with the survey published by The Asia Foundation (TAF) in 2012 to identify specific patterns in terms of access to communication technologies:

**Table 9 - Comparison between youth and general ownership of communication technologies**

	Badakhshan	Herat	Kabul	Kandahar	Kunduz	Balkh	Nangarhar	Total	NATIONAL – Based on TAF 2012 Survey <sup>110</sup>
<b>Radio</b>	88.9%	65.2%	73.2%	92.8%	89.5%	88.6%	74.5%	79.1%	80%
<b>Mobile</b>	94.7%	96.1%	92.6%	95.2%	98.6%	94.8%	93.8%	94.4%	71%
<b>TV</b>	82.6%	85.5%	81.3%	65.6%	89.5%	88.6%	74.5%	81.2%	52%
<b>Computer</b>	37.7%	55.1%	36.9%	7.7%	59.5%	52.4%	35.6%	39.7%	12%

**The survey found interesting differences between youths' access to communication technologies and overall figures for Afghan society.** Of particular note from this table:

- **The ownership of personal electronic devices such as computer and mobile phones is significantly higher amongst young people than within the nation as a whole.** Whilst TAF found that 71% of the population owned a mobile phone, our survey found that in the 7 surveyed provinces, 94.4% of youths owned their own mobile. The difference is also striking for computer and laptop ownership, with a 25 percentage point difference between the two surveys: 39.7% of the youths in these provinces, as against 12% in the TAF national survey, say that they own a computer.
- Differences across provinces are not striking, with the exception of Kandahar province, which shows a much lower rate of ownership of TVs (65.6%) and computers (7.7%) than the other provinces surveyed for this study. More generally, radio and TV coverage varies heavily by region: insecurity and the Afghan landscape both pose barriers to broadcasting, leaving some areas with only military radio and little-to-no television.<sup>111</sup>
- Interestingly, **gender does not appear to have a major impact on ownership of communication technologies**, as young women were more likely than their male counterparts to own each of the above-listed items, except for radio where the proportions are similar. For some of the items, it may be linked to the fact that these items are owned by households, rather than individuals, and are therefore equally accessible to men and women. Yet, the fact that young women have as much access to personal mobiles and computers suggests interesting possibilities for them to develop their own forms of sociability and negotiate the tight restrictions imposed by the Afghan society on its youths.

<sup>110</sup> Asia Foundation (2012), *Afghanistan in 2012: a survey of the Afghan people (2012)*, p.171

<sup>111</sup> Altai Consulting (2010), *Afghan Media in 2010: Synthesis Report*, Kabul, p. 35



## Use of Communication Technologies

### Radio and TV

Similar to other studies, this survey finds that the use of radio and television is widespread amongst the youths in the 7 provinces surveyed for this study. Interestingly, there are important differences in the use of radio and TV between male and female youths, as shown in table 4.2:

**Table 10 - Regular use of radio and TV (by province and gender)**

	% Respondents <b>often</b> listening to the radio		% Respondents <b>often</b> watching TV	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
Badakhshan	0%	23.1%	6.3%	37.2%
Herat	8.8%	43.9%	47.2%	58.5%
Kabul	17.1%	24.6%	37.0%	44.1%
Kandahar	67.5%	91.5%	50.0%	30.5%
Kunduz	1.6%	20.2%	11.9%	45.2%
Balkh	4.5%	9%	21.2%	56.4%
Nangarhar	27.2%	14.8%	33.6%	20.5%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>17.8%</b>	<b>30.5%</b>	<b>31.4%</b>	<b>42.3%</b>

In most provinces, young women appear to spend more time listening to the radio and watching TV than their male counterparts. Overall gender differences are significant. This can be linked to the fact that more than men, young women are confined to their houses where TV and radio are amongst the only sources of distraction. From a programmatic perspective, this is an important fact as accessing young women is very challenging in many parts of Afghanistan, especially in rural and remote areas. **TV and Radio campaigns are therefore amongst the only means available for awareness-raising programmes.** This has been already observed and used by other stakeholders, such as the Ministry of Women Affairs, which rely on TV- and radio-based campaigns to advocate for women's rights. As many radio and TV channels are dependent on revenue from advertising and public awareness campaigns, in some cases it is actually becoming more difficult to spread messages: radio and TV stations begin to want money to broadcast items which should be news releases<sup>112</sup>.

While radio remains the most popular type of media in the country overall, the higher rates of TV watching correspond to a slow shift observed by Altai Consulting from radio to TV. Television ownership has begun to replace radio ownership, and watching television has become more accepted as Altai found fewer people in 2010 considering it *haram*<sup>113</sup>. This does not mean that all television content is appreciated; foreign (esp. Indian) soap operas, for example, are frequently

<sup>112</sup> For example, the Afghan Women's Network has had trouble increasing awareness of issues around the EAW law because stations wished for them to place paid advertisements, rather than treating the content as press releases to be broadcast.

BBC Media p. 19

<sup>113</sup> Altai Consulting (2010), *Afghan Media in 2010*, pp. 98-101

blamed for causing women to talk back to their husbands<sup>114</sup> and encouraging young women to adopt “un-islamic” behavior<sup>115</sup>. While generally young people tend to watch the same channels as older people, Emroz had a higher share of the 15-20 year old age group before it was shut down and Lemar (Moby Group’s Pashto channel) has a higher share of 20-30 year olds, while national TV (RTA) skews older<sup>116</sup>.

The social impact of television among the youth cannot be discounted: Afghans under 30, for example, are nearly as likely to trust TV on religious issues as the local *mullah* (35% vs. 29%, as opposed to 42% vs. 22% for older Afghans)<sup>117</sup>.

### Computer and Internet

In the 7 provinces under review in this section, 42.7% of male respondents and 32.8% of female respondents declared having used a computer at least once in their life. In the majority of cases (85.4%), these respondents had their own computers. However, as illustrated by table 4.3, differences across provinces are important: in Kandahar, only 4.3% of respondents had already used a computer compared to 61.9% in Balkh or 52.9% in Kunduz. Table 4.3 also shows that both gender and the type of location where respondents reside have an impact on their access to computers.

Unsurprisingly, **youths living in rural areas have less access to computers than their urban counterparts**. As in the rest of the world, this can be explained by the role played by cities in the diffusion of innovation. This is especially true for Afghanistan where the rural/urban divide has been fuelled by several decades of political antagonism and where, often, the question of innovation and modernity coming from the cities was a major bone of contention between the capital and its provinces. Additional blame can be placed on the difficulties

**Box 5 – Media, Communication and Women in Afghanistan**  
Both media and communication technologies allow women to escape the constraints of the boundaries imposed by Afghan society; criticism of this access is reflected in the limitations around methods of use. Internet cafes, for example, are generally not open to young women<sup>118</sup>.

Content is also problematic: showing young men and women together in more western outfits, television is considered by conservative Afghans to have a bad influence on women<sup>119</sup>. The internet presents similar challenges, and in fact women are only half as likely as men to access it.

Technology does offer however offer some female-specific opportunities beyond communicating with people who would normally be outside of their social networks. Mobile money, for example, allows businesswomen to manage their own banking, rather than have to rely on a male relative to do so<sup>120</sup>.

<sup>114</sup> Altai Consulting (2010), *Afghan Media in 2010*, p. 137

<sup>115</sup> BBC Media (2012), p. 12

<sup>116</sup> Altai Consulting (2010), *Afghan Media in 2010*, p. 116

<sup>117</sup> Altai Consulting (2010), *Afghan Media in 2010*, p. 145

<sup>118</sup> Altai Consulting (2010), *Afghan Media in 2010*, p. 103

<sup>119</sup> BBC Media p. 12

<sup>120</sup> USAID (2012), “Apps for Afghanistan”, *Frontlines*, Sept-Oct. 2011, <http://www.usaid.gov/news-information/frontlines/youth-mobile-technology/apps-afghanistan>

in creating necessary infrastructure – e.g. laying optic fibre cables – due to insecurity in certain provinces<sup>121</sup>.

**Table 11 - Use of computer and internet**

	Use of Computer				Use of the Internet			
	Male	Female	Urban	Rural	Male	Female	Urban	Rural
Badakhshan	31.5%	20%	34.1%	16.0%	11%	2.5%	11.1%	2.5%
Herat	53.6%	49.4%	64.7%	26.1%	25.6%	16.9%	28.1%	10.1%
Kabul	42.1%	31.3%	51.8%	23.7%	24.1%	11.4%	30.4%	7.6%
Kandahar	7.1%	0%	2.2%	8.6%	4.8%	0%	1.4%	5.7%
Kunduz	58.7%	44%	68.3%	29.8%	38.9%	16.7%	42.9%	10.7%
Balkh	69.7%	48.7%	66.9%	54.7%	32.6%	16.7%	33.9%	16.3%
Nangarhar	36%	39.8%	47.1%	18.6%	20.8%	13.3%	24.6%	4.3%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>42.7%</b>	<b>32.8%</b>	<b>48.3%</b>	<b>25.3%</b>	<b>23.0%</b>	<b>11.1%</b>	<b>25.5%</b>	<b>8.1%</b>

Although regular use of the Internet remains fairly low across the country among the youth (18.3% of respondents answered that they used the Internet regularly), it is higher than among the population as a whole (whose use of internet is estimated at 7.2%)<sup>122</sup>. Amongst the youths who possess a computer, 47.2% mentioned using the Internet and another 44% declared that they did not use the Internet because they did not have access to it. For the use of the Internet as well, gender and type of residence are important factors, with young males twice as likely to be using the Internet than young females, and youths living in urban areas more than three times as likely to use the Internet than their rural counterparts. Across provinces, Kandahar once again presented an atypical profile with 0% of female respondents using the Internet and an overall very low use of the Internet compared to other provinces included in this survey.

Quite typically, the use of Internet by young respondents is mainly for communication purposes, with 43.3% mentioning emails, 71.7% Facebook and 29.7% chatting. 47.2% of young respondents also use the Internet to get information and news. Students also use the internet completing limited or out-of-date information available to them in school textbooks as well as providing a forum for discussion, often via Facebook<sup>123</sup>. The use of Facebook, Twitter or chat functions are typical activities that mainly attract young people (as of 2012, 80% of social media users were between 15-40) and remain outside the sphere of control of parents and other family members<sup>124</sup>. The ability of these new forms of communication to impact social relations is not to be under-estimated as they open a range of opportunities for young Afghans to develop their own, youth-specific, forms of interactions.

<sup>121</sup> Altai Consulting (2010), *Afghan Media in 2010*, p. 35

<sup>122</sup> Taking population of Afghanistan to be 33.4M, and Ministry of Communication and Information Technology estimate of 2.4M internet users in 2013, <http://mcit.gov.af/Content/images/Eng%20-%20Internet%20Users.png> )

<sup>123</sup> Altai Consulting (2010), *Afghan Media in 2010*, pp. 142-143

<sup>124</sup> UNAMA (2012), "Social Media Week: Afghanistan's youth embrace social media", 25 July 2012, <http://unama.unmissions.org/Default.aspx?tabid=12254&ctl=Details&mid=15756&Itemid=35552&language=en-US>

## Mobile Phones

As of 2012, 85% of the country was within the network of at least one of the four major providers<sup>125</sup>. As a result, in addition to their traditional communicative uses, mobile technology has been used for such diverse purposes as electoral monitoring, transferring money, spreading market-pricing information and literacy programming<sup>126</sup>. The youth of the Afghan population makes a population of “potential early adopters,” and they appreciate the potential that these technologies offer; a recent app design contest among Afghan university students for the best way to use mobile money received over 5000 entries, many of them focused on ways this could improve the government<sup>127</sup>.

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<sup>125</sup> USAID (2012), “Apps for Afghanistan”, *Frontlines*, Sept-Oct. 2011, <http://www.usaid.gov/news-information/frontlines/youth-mobile-technology/apps-afghanistan>

<sup>126</sup> Electoral monitoring: see University of California, Center for Global Action (2011), “Using Smartphones to reduce electoral Fraud in Afghanistan and Uganda”, <http://cega.berkeley.edu/research/using-smartphones-to-reduce-electoral-fraud-in-afghanistan-and-uganda/>

Money transfers: see USAID (2012), “Apps for Afghanistan”, *Frontlines*, Sept-Oct. 2011, <http://www.usaid.gov/news-information/frontlines/youth-mobile-technology/apps-afghanistan>

Market-pricing information: see Altai Consulting (2010), *Afghan Media in 2010*, p. 126

Literacy programming: see Mojaddidi, Mushtaq (2012), “Afghan Women Learn Literacy Through Mobile Phones”, AFP, Kabul, 13 Nov. 2013

[http://www.google.com/hostednews/afp/article/ALeqM5iyfxR0gGQ8bq8ba18eSEfTDRR\\_Zg](http://www.google.com/hostednews/afp/article/ALeqM5iyfxR0gGQ8bq8ba18eSEfTDRR_Zg)

<sup>127</sup> USAID (2012), “Apps for Afghanistan”, *Frontlines*, Sept-Oct. 2011, <http://www.usaid.gov/news-information/frontlines/youth-mobile-technology/apps-afghanistan>



### 3. VOICES OF A GENERATION

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*The youth should be appreciated because they will make Afghanistan.*

*- Weda, 22 years old, Badakhshan*

#### 3.1 Perspectives and Attitudes

Afghanistan's youth in 2013 are living at a time of transition – their beliefs are an indicator of the ways in which they consider themselves prepared to cope with the uncertainties ahead. Their perceptions of their value in society, their relationship with their parents, elders and the government, along with their opinions of the government, of the country's security and of their "national" belonging, are all pieces of a wider puzzle that determine the place – and the voice – of the youth in Afghanistan at a time of ongoing transition.

#### Value of Youth in Afghan Society

Both the quantitative survey and focus group discussions sought to find out whether Afghan youth felt that their opinions were valued in their society. The responses were mixed in the survey, but clearer in focus groups: the majority of youths interviewed felt undervalued in society, women more so than men, with a key issue being the perceived generational gap – a malaise not by any means limited to Afghanistan. A number of youth, irrespective of whether their opinions were valued or not, felt that the decision-making cadre in Afghanistan was largely an elderly society, with little space to accommodate the youth, today or tomorrow. The following section explores this perception.

### 3.1.1.1. Amongst Parents and Elders in the Community

Overall, the dissatisfied youth were predominantly located in urban areas, as compared to rural locations, and were represented by greater numbers of female youths who felt their voices went unheard, as compared to men, among their parents and elders in their community. Provinces where youth felt that they were not valued included Kabul, Herat, Kandahar and Baghlan. Whilst the causes of this can only be conjectured, anecdotal evidence has suggests that this is because of relative availability of information that prompted youth to be more critical of their environment and being more involved in the public sphere. 30.5% of the respondents in Baghlan felt that their opinions were not valued while in Faryab, only 4.5% of the respondents felt that their opinions were not valued by their parents and elders.

### 3.1.1.2. The generational gap in decision-making in Afghanistan

Not unlike many European countries and the United States, where articles on “Gen Y”, “Millenials” and generation gaps abound<sup>128</sup>, qualitative research suggested that many young people feel discriminated on the basis of age – both for job opportunities and important decision-making roles. The quote below from a focus group discussion conducted in Kabul, amongst youth working in media sums up the perception widely cited in this research:

*I think the problem lies in the lack of tolerance. The older generation should tolerate the younger generation. Youth should gather and work together and be connected. Youth can do everything, they are full of energy and they are educated.*

*- Ehsaan, 20 years, Kabul*

Interviews with youth involved in youth groups also showed that many felt that the ‘Facebook generation’ were being kept at a distance and put down. The above quote highlights two key aspects noticeable in Afghan society – at the micro-level, the elderly are given more weight within the family and community. At the macro level, youth feel that there are some who are trying to keep a hold on the political system blocking off youth from participating and shaping their country’s future.

## Understanding of Human Rights

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights was adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations in 1948, defining a range of human rights that should apply to all. Yet, fifty years later, many of these are not applied, and they are not always recognized as actual rights. Today, one of the major challenges in Afghanistan is the identification of these rights and their application. In 2010, the Afghan International Human Rights Commission (AIHRC) counted complaints around 809 cases of human rights violations, and “successfully investigated” 98% of these<sup>129</sup>.

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<sup>128</sup> See for example *Time Magazine*, <http://business.time.com/2013/09/05/flip-flops-at-work-millennials-finally-get-what-they-want/>

<sup>129</sup> Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC) (2011), *Annual Report 2010-2011*, p. 8



### 3.1.1.3. Importance of Human Rights

The notion of an individual identity with its own rights, separate from an identity taken from a *qowm*, community or family is still a nascent concept especially among young people. Therefore, even though an overwhelming number of people said that human rights were important, this was more indicative of what they thought about human rights as an abstract concept rather than an indication of:

- a) What they thought their own human rights were;
- b) Whether they thought their human rights were being upheld;
- c) Who was responsible for safeguarding their human rights, and;
- d) Whom they could approach, if they felt that their rights were being violated.

The following sections highlight what the youth surveyed potentially considered as a human right at the time of the fieldwork.

### 3.1.1.4. What constitutes a human right?

Understandings of human rights varied vastly between the youth. The disconnect between Afghan law and procedure and international human rights organizations poses further difficulties in this regard<sup>130</sup>. When asked about human rights, youth in varying degrees equated them with religion, equality and freedom. But nuanced differences between how they constructed human rights with modernity also emerged.

#### Human Rights and Religious Values

*Yes, I know what human rights are, human rights have been written in the holy Quran 14 hundred years ago. Women and men have equal rights according to Islam.*

*-Abdul Rahman, 18 years, Balkh*

A link between religion and human rights goes much beyond just casual ignorance of what is a human right. Interviews with youth across the country repeatedly suggest that they are trying to negotiate a space in between modernity (identified with western values) on the one hand and Islam and religion on the other rather than seeing them in black and white. The quote below highlights such a negotiation and shows what equating human rights with religion entails for the youth:

*We support human rights but most human rights are not implemented. In some areas people keep quiet, for example in some cases Islamic Law says one thing, and human rights says something else. For example in Islamic Law it is said that if one steals something, his hand needs to be cut off. But this is against human rights. In Human rights there is no justice, the focus is more on equality. In Islamic law there is justice and equality.*

*- Ehsaan, 23 years, Kabul*

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<sup>130</sup> Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC) (2012), *Violence Against Women in Afghanistan*, p. 9



This quote, by a 23-year-old youth in Kabul shows a dialogue between modernity and Islam in the minds of the youth. Even in the above two quotes how one youth sets a distance between the two and how the other equates it is indicative of this dialogue. This comes as a more moderate view than among Afghans overall, as the *Survey of the Afghan People* reports 69% of Afghans as agreeing more with the statement that religious leaders “should be regularly consulted on the problems facing an area” than that stating that “politics and religion should not mix<sup>131</sup>.”

### **Human Rights and Equality**

Equality was also a strong theme that emerged in qualitative discussions with youth in various provinces. For example:

*Human rights are that every person's right should be known and considered; for example, when a prisoner goes to prison, we should treat him like a human, not like an animal; but in Afghanistan, the soldiers don't behave with prisoners well and human rights are trampled*

*- Atifa, 20 years, Nimroz*

When the respondents were asked to pick out what they thought were the human rights that they were entitled to and what were not, the five areas that most thought were human rights were security, equality before law, education, work and marriage. 12% of the respondents also felt that discrimination against other ethnic groups was also a human right. Within all of these, freedom and equality between men and women emerged as key. The last point may have been at the forefront of respondents’ attention given recent debates about the future of the EAW law and the position of women in the country as it moves forward.

### **Human Rights and Freedom**

Those who equate human rights with freedom say:

*Living freely is called human rights.*

*- Hadi, 18 years, Bamyán*

The quotes above bring forth several questions – Does living freely imply a freedom at the micro level – i.e. living freely from parental pressures and restrictions, living freely from having to make difficult choices between education and employment; or does it imply living freely at a macro level? Living freely from violence for instance, or living freely from social pressures and norms? Or living freely from a constant influx of international troops and people from other countries, or is it living freely from the corruption and endemic ills of their own government system?

The research for this survey found that there was a large gap between the knowledge of human rights as a concept amongst the respondents as opposed to its implications on their real lives. For some sections of the target population for example, human rights were something that was studied, but otherwise had no meaning beyond the school walls.

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<sup>131</sup> Asia Foundation (2012), *A Survey of the Afghan People 2012*, p. 129

*Afghanistan is an Islamic country, but human rights are like a symbol. In my idea, the best human rights are Islam's human rights. There aren't human rights in Afghanistan. The powerful only make decisions and implement them.*

*- Mahmood, 20 years, Nimroz*

For others, there was a critical understanding of how human rights manifest themselves in Afghan society. For example, 15-year-old Toubah from Kabul, just beginning her youth years, felt that it is the people that do not appreciate their rights. She clearly identifies that the demand for safeguarding of human rights, should come first and foremost from the people themselves, in this case, from the youth.

*In my idea, the youth's rights are trampled by their families; for example, many families don't let their daughters study. In my idea, the community should try to keep their rights. The government tries to protect human rights, but the people don't appreciate their rights.*

*-Toubah, 15 years, Kabul*

### **3.1.1.5. Equality between men and women – a human right?**

The World Development Report (2012) defines gender equality as follows: “Gender refers to the social, behavioral, and cultural attributes, expectations, and norms associated with being a woman or a man. Gender equality refers to how these aspects determine how women and men relate to each other and to the resulting differences in power between them.”<sup>132</sup>

Gender equality and the espousal of women’s rights have been a flagship agenda of the international intervention in Afghanistan. Moreover, the Afghan constitution, established in 2004, notes gender equality in Article 22, which states the following: “Any kind of discrimination and privilege between the citizens of Afghanistan are prohibited. The citizens of Afghanistan – whether man or woman – have equal rights and duties before the law.” In addition, Articles 43 and 44 of the constitution guarantee women’s right to education, and article 48 codifies their right to work<sup>133</sup>.

The research strongly suggested that at least in theory, youth – both men and women – felt that women should play an important role in the society and reconstruction of Afghanistan, and have a more liberal view towards the role of women in society. In a Survey of the Afghan People, 45% of the population as a whole state that women and men should have “equal representation in the political leadership” and 87% agree at least somewhat with the statement that “women should have equal opportunities like men in education.”<sup>134</sup>

*Studying and teaching is necessary for men and women. Women have permission to work in governmental offices on the outside and they can become doctors, engineers and teachers. Women are the main part of our community and they can work on the outside and participate in reconstruction of the country.*

<sup>132</sup> World Bank (2012), *2012 World Development Report on Gender Equality and Development*, p.4

<sup>133</sup> Khan, A. (2012), *Women & Gender in Afghanistan*, Civil-Military Fusion Centre (CFC)

<sup>134</sup> Asia Foundation (2012), *A survey of the Afghan people (2012)*, p. 265

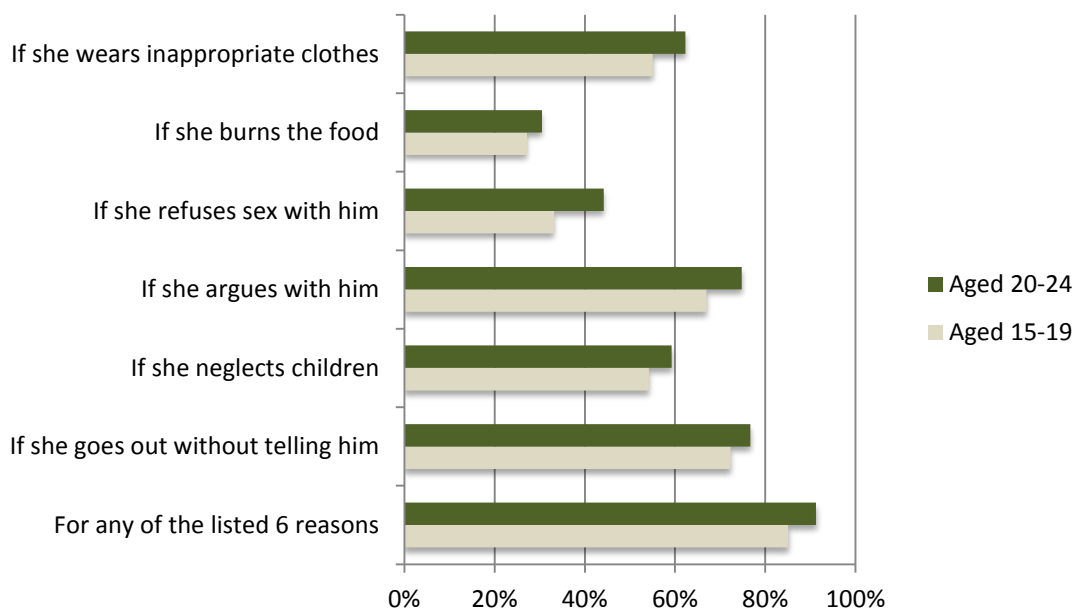
There was a positive trend in the way both male and female youth perceived the role of women and equality between men and women in society. Reality may be more challenging. Human Rights Watch reports that “discrimination [against women] is rampant and appalling abuses [...] are rarely prosecuted<sup>135</sup>.” This did come out in the qualitative questions as, for example, some women in urban areas were more scathing of the position between men and women:

*Women are under the role of men and their rights are trampled. Women don't have rights as humans; they are hit and insulted by their families and husbands. Women have right to work in community like men and become doctors and teachers, because female doctors can treat women; a female teacher can teach girls. Boys and girls don't have equal rights in afghan community; they don't have equal rights not only in community but also in their homes.*

- Bibi Gul, 19 years, Herat

However, it is crucial to note that some of the attitudes towards women’s rights and gender equality, which non-Afghans might find problematic, are held not just by Afghan men. The graph below highlights the high percentage of women who believe that husbands are justified in beating their wives under certain circumstances<sup>136</sup>.

**Graph 22 - % of women agreeing that husbands are justified beating their wives under the following circumstances**



Source – CSO/UNICEF (2013), Afghanistan Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey

More encouragingly, younger women were less likely to agree with the statements than older women. Nevertheless, some of the qualitative respondents placed equal responsibility on the men to bring about change in the condition of women –

<sup>135</sup> Human Rights Watch (2012), “I had to run away”- The Imprisonment of Women and Girls for “Moral Crimes” in Afghanistan, Kabul, p. 2

<sup>136</sup> Afghanistan Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (2013), p. 137

*What we have seen in Afghanistan is why do only women defend women's rights? Why not men? Where ever you go you see that only women who have been to abroad defend women's rights. But rarely you see a men coming and defending women's rights. Why? Because men have not changed their arrogance. They think it's a shame when they sit next to a woman and say that they also defend women's rights. This should be changed. Only when a man comes and sits next to a woman and says I also defend women's right.*

*-Ehsan, 23 years, Kabul*

Research in rural areas showed that some men thought women were capable enough to represent people in jirgas and should work in government offices. They recognized the fact that boys and girls don't have an equal role in Afghan society. That being said, some also felt that equality for women fell under the purview of her duties towards her husband and her cooperation with him under Islamic law. In Kabul, there were more concrete ways in which youth thought that they could bring about a change. For example -

*I want to show the strength of Afghan women. I am currently working on a documentary that is called 'the strength of Afghan women'. It's about women who are in the government, who are businesswomen, members of parliament; it's about their lives. It's about the positive side of Afghan women.*

*-Nadir, 24 years, Kabul*

Whilst the position of women in Afghanistan still remains dismal, a change in attitude amongst the youth can be looked at as a positive sign. What this section has highlighted most importantly is a debate within the minds of the youth: issues like women's rights, equality, and freedom are being construed within the twin parameters of modernity and Islam, belying assumptions that one is always favoured over the other.

## **Attitudes towards the Government**

To the question of whether they thought the government valued their opinion, the feedback was mixed: 39.2% responded that the government did not value them, 38.6% the positive opposite, whilst 22.2% said that they did not know. The range of opinions showed, in effect, a divide between issues where youth *can* have an input, and issues where they cannot. These decisions are not made by them, but by their leaders and rules, as explained below:

*The youth's ideas are heard in some issues; for example, the government wanted to hear the youth's ideas about teaching and training, but the youth do not have any role in government decisions.*

*- Noor Ahmad, 24 years, Herat*

In order to get their voices heard, 66.3% of the respondents felt that the most effective way was through participating in discussions with community elders, leaders and *shuras* whilst 46% felt that supporting a youth group, civil society organization or an NGO would be the way. 50% of the

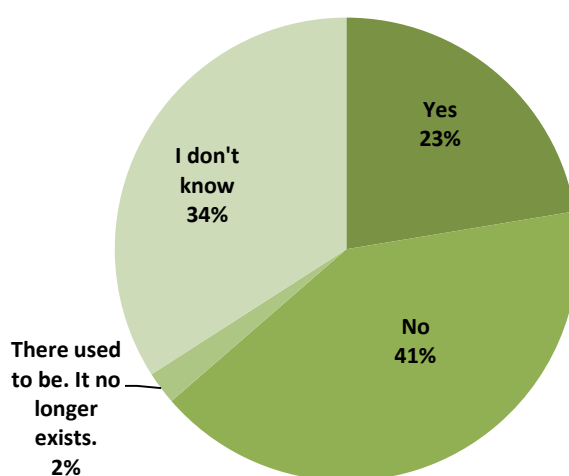
respondents felt that studying and working abroad to help your community was a way to get their voices heard – underlining the imbalance between the impact of national and international advocacy in Afghanistan. Only 4.3% of the youth, who were mainly based in Kabul, said that media was an effective medium for them.

Based on the survey and substantiated by the qualitative research, it seems that Afghan youth feel that even if they can influence government, it will be first and foremost at the local level representation of the government and not at a national scale. Afghan youth do not feel like their voices can be heard at the national level.

More encouragingly, however, a TOLO News poll (of 790 people who accessed the TOLO website) reported that 65.6% of respondents believe that “youths have a political say in the political process of the country<sup>137</sup>.” 77.2% of respondents in a similar online TOLO poll agreed with the statement that “Afghan youth and the Afghan people will participate in the 2013 elections because it will lead to a legitimate change in the country<sup>138</sup>.”

### 3.1.1.6. Efficacy of the Government

**Graph 23 - Awareness about existence of the Deputy Ministry of Youth Affairs (DMoYA)**



Respondents were asked whether they were aware of the existence of a dedicated government wing for youth affairs. 41% of the respondents noted that there was no such ministry whilst 34% said that they did not know. Only 23% responded by saying yes. Predictably though, more respondents living in urban areas (13.1%) knew of it than those living in rural areas (9.3%).

This is indicative of a lack of presence of DMoYA in the provinces, a lack of an overall national youth strategy and a lack of access to modern channels of communication like television or the Internet.

<sup>137</sup> TOLO News poll (website, as of 13 Oct. 2013, sample of 790), <http://www.tolonews.com/en/component/poll/40-do-you-think-the-youths-have-a-say-in-the-political-process-of-the-country->

<sup>138</sup> TOLO News poll (website, as of 13 Oct. 2013, sample of 1428), <http://tolonews.com/component/poll/36-afghan-youth-and-the-afghan-people-will-participate-in-the-2014-elections-because-it-will-lead-to-a-legitimate-change-in-the-country>

The implication of youth not knowing about DMoYA feeds negatively into a) the reach that DMoYA has for their projects and b) the accessibility of DMoYA, especially in the provinces. The latter would also have an impact on the efficacy of DMoYA programmes.

That being said, a majority of respondents (47%) appeared to think that the government was somewhat successful in governing the country. 20% appeared dissatisfied with the activities of the government and 19% remained neutral, saying that the government was neither successful nor unsuccessful in governing the country. This appears rather lower than general population's confidence in the government: the 2012 *Survey of the Afghan People* (TAF) found that 75% of respondents were positive in their assessment of the government<sup>139</sup>. Again this may point to a fundamental lack of information about the roles, responsibilities and achievements of the government among the youth of Afghanistan.

Respondents were then asked about how they thought the government was working to help the youth of the country. 30.5% of the respondents felt that the government tried to improve services for the youth such as education. Only 17.3% said that the government was trying to improve employment prospects for the youth. 21.6% said that the government did not listen to the youth's political opinion and did not integrate it into the political system. 7.6% of the population felt that the government actively hindered the youths' involvement in society.

**Those who were dissatisfied with the work that the government was doing reported that the government was not implementing any services directed to the youth (24.5%).**

*The youth are losing faith in the government after having such high expectations when the President first came to power. The government has formed systems but no one uses these systems correctly. There are many crimes in Afghanistan that are not broadcasted by the media. The government's activities have been good in some issues like creating the systems and constitution, but the constitution has not been applied correctly. Hospitals have been constructed but without professional doctors.*

*- Salim, 24 years, Herat*

The issue of corruption is important when evaluating perceptions of the government. Afghanistan is ranked 174<sup>th</sup> in Transparency International's Corruption Perception Index (2012), tied for last place with North Korea and Somalia.<sup>140</sup> The public sector is most frequently perceived as being corrupt (compared to the private sector, NGOs, the media, etc.)<sup>141</sup>. Young people aged 18-25 are most likely to believe the most corrupt sectors to be the ministries of Education, Finance, Interior, and Energy, along with the courts and the election commission – potentially discouraging political participation<sup>142</sup>.

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<sup>139</sup> Asia Foundation (2012), *A survey of the Afghan people*, pp. 84-85

<sup>140</sup> Transparency International, *2012 Corruption Perception Index*, <http://cpi.transparency.org/cpi2012/results/>

<sup>141</sup> Integrity Watch Afghanistan (2013), *National Corruption Survey 2012*, Kabul, p. 38

<sup>142</sup> Integrity Watch Afghanistan (2013), *National Corruption Survey 2012*, p. 39

### 3.1.1.7. *Exposure to Violence and Sense of (in)security*

Insecurity is one of the three most frequently cited problems facing Afghanistan, especially in the West<sup>143</sup>. The majority of the respondents were either ambivalent of the security situation in the country or felt that it was becoming worse with 32.5% considering the security situation as deteriorating or poor in the country, and 24.6% not seeing any change in recent times. Less than half (42.8%) said that they felt that the security situation was good or was improving.

Respondents were also asked whether they had ever been exposed to violence personally. 86.2% said that they had not been exposed to violence, whether directly or indirectly. Personal violence in this case was understood as violence due to fighting between external parties and did not include instances of domestic violence. 6.8% said that they had lost family members or friends to acts of violence in the country whilst 6.1% said that they had witnessed violence personally. This could be attributed both to the sample size and the fact that the research team did not travel to the country's more insecure areas – a strict limitation to this study. This may also show an improvement over previous decades, as a 2003 CDC Survey showed that 16% of respondents had lost a family member to murder and 11.5% had lost someone they knew to murder<sup>144</sup>.

Of those who said that they had been injured through violence, the majority came from Nangarhar (30%). Those who had witnessed violence personally were mostly from Kabul (28.4%) and Kandahar (13.6%). 94.2% of the respondents in Badakhshan and Baghlan had never witnessed violence either directly or indirectly. Kunduz and Panjshir also reported high numbers of respondents who had never witnessed or been exposed to violence directly or indirectly. These figures are in line with the provincial security overview in the country.<sup>145</sup> The only anomaly is Kabul where the level of security is comparatively high but still recorded a high number of respondents who had been exposed to violence – indicating possible trends of internal displacement of families having left more insecure areas to seek safety in Kabul. Interestingly, in Kabul, the most prevalent fear among women is not one of personal violence or harassment but rather of suicide bombers (close to 70% of women)<sup>146</sup>.

### 3.1.1.8. *A Sense of Nationalism amongst Afghan Youth*

Respondents were asked to identify with a statement on nationalism. 39.5% identified with being Afghan more than their ethnicity. Of these, 49.3% were Tajik and 34.6% were Pashtun. 38.4% feel strongly only about being Afghan rather than their ethnicity whilst 12.8% identify with being neither Afghan nor ethnicity, but only with being Muslim. Of these, the majority were Tajiks (49.9%), with Pashtuns (15.8%), Hazara (15.2%) and Uzbek (14.4%) following. More women identified with their ethnicity than with being Afghan or Muslim. As a point of comparison, the most recent “British Social Attitudes” found that 40.4% of respondents identified as British, versus 37.8% identifying as English,

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<sup>143</sup> Asia Foundation (2012), *A survey of the Afghan people*, p. 5

<sup>144</sup> Cardozo et al. (2004), *Mental Health, Social Functioning and Disability in Postwar Afghanistan*, p. 579

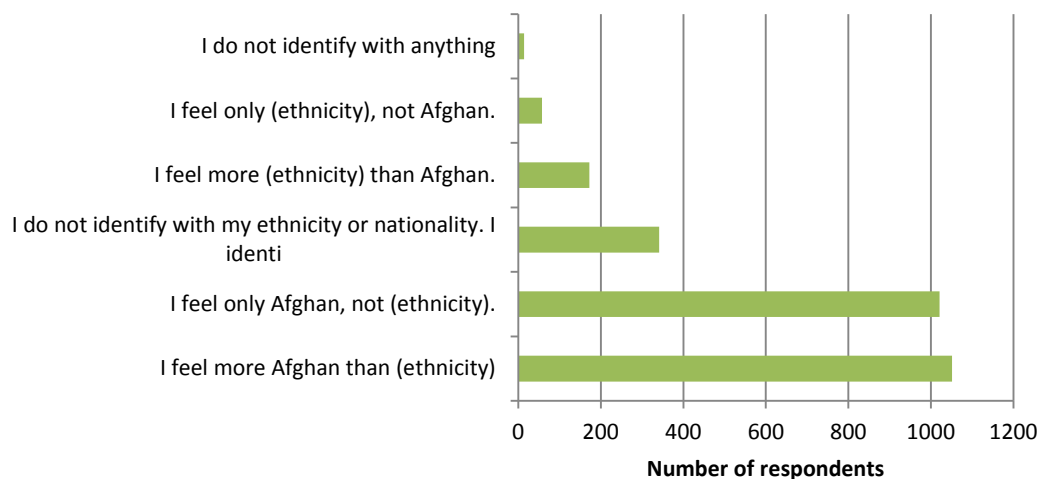
<sup>145</sup> Afghanistan NGO Safety Office (ANSO) quarterly data report

<sup>146</sup> Samuel Hall (2012), *The Challenge of Becoming Invisible: Understanding Women's Security in Kabul*, commissioned by Heinrich Böll Stiftung, Kabul, p. 41



7% as Scottish, 3.6% as Welsh, 1.3% as some form of Irish, 3% as European and the rest as other<sup>147</sup>; diversity in ethnic identity does not preclude efficient functioning as a government.

**Graph 24 - Nationalism amongst youth in Afghanistan**

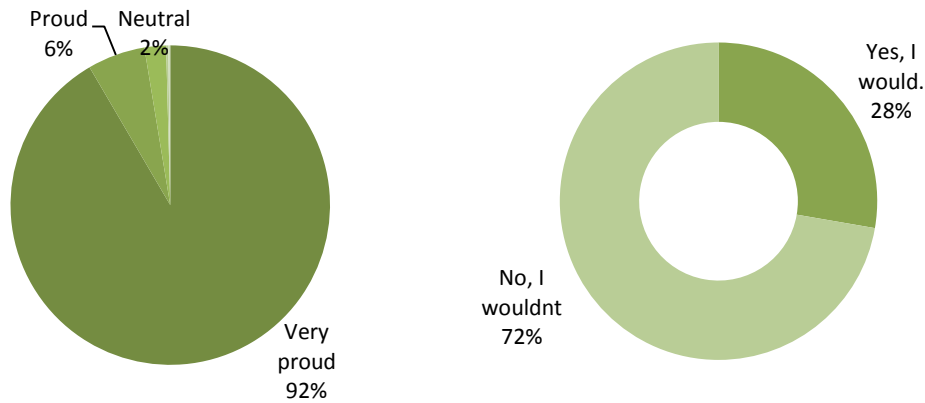


There are few national statistics available to researchers in this area, but there are other indicators that provide proxy information. For example, there are a number of Facebook groups and pages centred around pride in being Afghan and youth movements in Afghanistan: “Afghanistan” has 24244 members, “Afghan youth movement for national unity,” 2304, “Anti-corruption movement of Afghanistan,” 2571, and Hamid Karzai’s page garners 21711 likes. This is reflected in the above results. 91.5% of the respondents voiced a strong sense of pride in being Afghan. As the graph above highlights, 72% of the respondents also said that they would not accept the citizenship of another country whilst 28% of respondents said that they would, and these were mainly based in urban areas. Interestingly, the responses were gender balanced: the number of females (29.4%) who said that they would accept foreign citizenship was only minimally higher than the number of males (26.2%).

Provincial data showed that while youth may be willing to leave the country, they remain attached to Afghanistan. In Badakhshan and Paktia – bordering provinces with Afghanistan’s neighbours – 45% and 43.8%, respectively, of respondents said that they would leave. However, they would not accept a foreign citizenship. Whether in Badakhshan (82.1%), Baghlan (81%), Balkh (81.9%), or Parwan (87.5%), the desire to leave was not matched by a desire to acquire a foreign citizenship. This remained true in Kabul, where 31.1% would accept foreign citizenship whilst 68.6% said that they would not.

**Graph 25 – How proud are you to be Afghan?    Graph 26 – Would you accept foreign citizenship?**

<sup>147</sup> Nat Cen Social Research (2012), 29<sup>th</sup> British Social Attitudes Survey



Opinions on nationalism are important in a country that has seen war and unrest as also the influx of foreign forces. The findings of the survey point to some interesting trends. What is most significant is a) the sense of being a proud Afghan (which was the dominant feeling), but also b) for those who remain undecided or divided, to find out the causes of what makes people identify as Afghan, what makes them think of themselves as Pashtun, Tajik, or Hazara and in what circumstances would they find themselves conflicted. Like in other countries, where youth engage over pop culture and domestic issues, Afghan youth lack a common denominator that can draw them together from various provinces on common ground. Nationalism is one such factor that can become this denominator. But nationalism also needs to be grounded in implicit activities in order to have any meaningful impact in empowering the youth. A fascinating finding of the survey was that even girls between the ages of 15 and 17 in rural Ghazni, identified Ruhollah Nekpa as their idol for the unanimous reason that he had done Afghanistan proud. Nekpa has perhaps inspired an entire generation of youth in Afghanistan and given to them a link between a concept like nationalism and what it can mean for them and their country in reality.

Similarly, brain drain of skilled Afghan youth is a concern held by many policymakers in Afghanistan, especially in light of transition. However, the survey showed that presently, youth opinions on migration fall over the spectrum of being in Afghanistan rather than leaving. Admittedly, a number of these respondents have never been abroad and may perhaps change their minds in the future, as the security and economic situations deteriorate. This will have to be tracked – through perception surveys – as an indicator of youth’s perception of stability and security in their country. The aspirations of youth with regards to their future will be further developed in the next section.

## 3.2 Expectations and aspirations

### Socio-political involvement

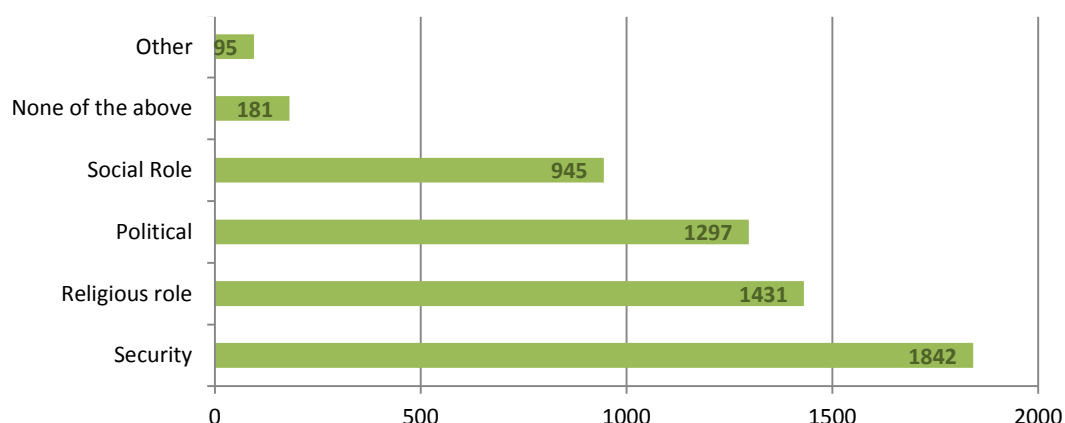
*I and the youth should improve our people's lives by teaching and training; because our fathers couldn't improve the country by weapons.*

*-Auzra, 15 years, Kunduz*

#### 3.2.1.1 General Perceptions on Youth Participation

Respondents were asked to prioritize the areas in which they felt that the youth could play an important role in the future of Afghanistan. 69.3% mentioned security, whilst another 53% envisaged an important role for the youth in religious activities. Only 6.8% of them did not see any of the sectors as priority areas where they thought the youth could make a difference.

Graph 27 - Areas where the role of youth can be of priority



*The youth, who work in government, they have a minor role in government decisions, but the youth, who are in districts, they don't have any role in government decisions.*

*-Shahla, 16 years, Herat*

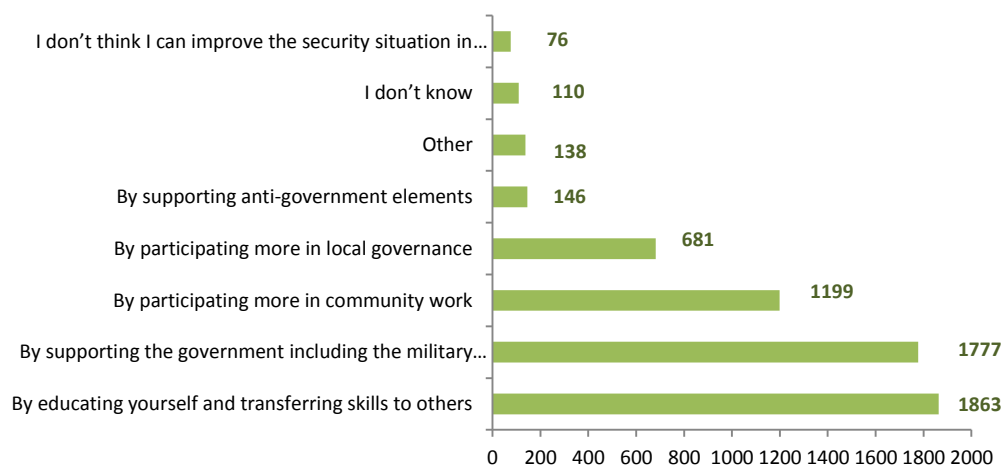
#### 3.2.1.2 Role in Security

When asked about how they thought they could improve the security situation in the country, most respondents (70.1%) mentioned education and transfer of knowledge and skills. 66.9% of the respondents said that they would be ready to support the government (including the military and the police) whilst 45.1% were in favour of participating more in community work. Such support could help improve the efficacy of government work in this area. For example, the Asia Foundation reports that only 52% of victims of crime report it to the police; additional support for the police might increase frequency of reporting crime, and, eventually, preventing it<sup>148</sup>. This support, however, does

<sup>148</sup> Asia Foundation (2012), *A survey of the Afghan people (2012)*, p. 42

not extend to joining security forces: although the youth of Afghanistan are willing to support the government, only 1.2% wish to become soldiers.

**Graph 28 - How can the youth improve the security situation in the country?**



Of those living in insecure regions where security is declining, like Kandahar and Paktia<sup>149</sup>, 70.8% respondents within Kandahar and 84% respondents within Paktia said that the youth could improve the security situation by joining the ANSF. As for supporting AOG groups, 50% of were in Kabul, 20.9% in Kandahar and 16.7% in Paktia.

### 3.2.1.3 Political Participation

The interest in politics is clear for the majority of Afghan youth – whether they are very interested in politics (42%) or somewhat interested in politics (22.8%), politics is part of Afghan youth’s reality. The top four provinces with the highest interests in politics were Kabul, Herat, Kunduz and Balkh. On the other end of the spectrum, in Kandahar and Paktia, those who were not at all interested in politics outnumbered those who were. Insecurity and the nature of politics in the eastern provinces could indicate why this is so. However in all the remaining provinces, the majority of youths reported varying degree of interest in politics.

18.1% of women said that they were very interested in politics – most of whom are based in Kabul. Given the conservative nature of society, the number of women who were not interested in politics was highest in Kandahar (47%), Paktia (64.3%) and Nangarhar (39.8%).

This interest was not reflected in the degree and nature of participation in political activities. **80.9% of the respondents are not actively involved in any political party.** Of those who are, 8.9% are a part of a student or youth association whilst 6.4% are a part of religious groups.

<sup>149</sup> See ANSO quarterly data reports available at <http://afgnso.org>

The lack of youth participation could be indicative of not enough platforms that allow youth to participate in political activities or a lack of initiative and desire in the youth themselves to translate their interest into participation. External factors may also come into play: for example, according to the Asia Foundation, 54% of the population report having “some level of fear to vote in a national election.”<sup>150</sup>

Despite this, voting itself appears quite popular. When asked whether they planned to vote in the future, well over three quarters of respondents (85.6%) said that they would vote because they had a civic right to. 27.9% said that they would vote because they felt it would give them a voice in the political system. 14.4% said that they would vote even though they did not believe in the system because they should. Only 5.3% said that they would not vote again. Reasons for this included dissatisfaction with the last elections in which they had voted, feeling like their vote did not matter and that the political system was ineffective. Should the 85.6% of youth stating they would vote in the next election do so, this would be a youth voter turnout materially higher than the turnout in Afghanistan overall (the 2009 presidential election recorded a turnout of 38.8%<sup>151</sup>) and the youth turnout out in say, the United States (45% of 18-29 year olds voted in the 2012 presidential election)<sup>152</sup>.

Respondents who had reached the voting age mentioned, for the majority (61.2%), that they chose their candidates because they felt that the candidate was the best of poor options – i.e. the ‘least worse’ of all. 54.9% respondents believed in the candidate’s ability and political message. 13% said that they identified with the candidates ethnicity, region/province.

## Expectations from the Government

As the graph below highlights, 83.9% of the respondents felt that the government should focus more on security. Earlier on in the report, it was highlighted that most respondents thought that it was security that determined the availability of employment opportunities in a place. It is therefore clear, that for Afghan youth, security holds a very important place in the way they imagine their future and the future of Afghanistan. The government therefore must take into account this fact and do all that it can to reassure young people.

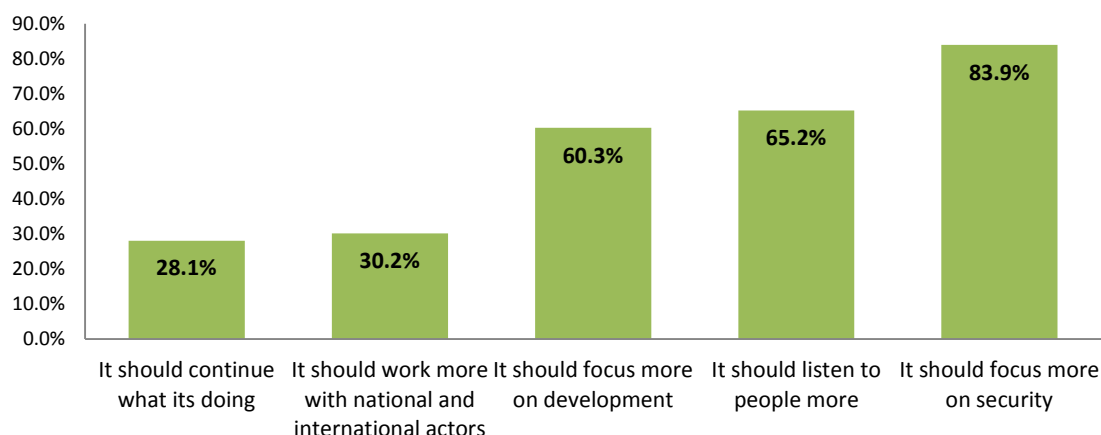
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<sup>150</sup> Asia Foundation (2012), *A survey of the Afghan people*, p. 6

<sup>151</sup> Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance, “Voter Turnout for Afghanistan”, last updated 2011.  
<http://www.idea.int/vt/countryview.cfm?id=4>

<sup>152</sup> Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement, Tufts University, accessed on website October 2013  
<http://www.civicyouth.org/quick-facts/youth-voting/>

**Graph 29 - Expectations from the government**



✓ **It should continue what it is doing now: 10.2% only**

Only 17% of the male and 10.2% of the female youth respondents said that the government should continue doing what it is doing now. An overwhelming 71.8% of the respondents felt that the government should not continue the way it is working right now. Those who were unsatisfied with the government’s current work, felt that it should first focus on security, then on what the people are saying, following which, it should focus on development and work more with international partners.

✓ **The government should focus more on security: an overwhelming 84%**

86% women felt that the government should focus more on security whilst 82.1% men felt the same. 60.1% in the urban areas as opposed to 39.9% in the rural areas too felt that the government should focus more on security. The number of women who felt that it should be the priority of the government were more in urban areas than rural areas, corroborating that women feel harassed on the streets in Kabul. This could extend to other urban centres as well, where women are trying to be more visible in the public domain in order to work. The five top provinces where respondents felt that the government should focus on security were Kabul (20.8%), Nangarhar (7.5%), Herat (7%), Balkh (6.9%) and Kandahar (6.3%). More respondents between the ages of 15-20 felt that the government should focus on security more than those who were between the ages of 21-25 years.

✓ **It should listen to the people more: about 50%...**

59.5% male and 40.5% women felt that the government should listen to the people more. These youth were mostly aged between the ages of 15 and 18 years accounting for 45% of the total respondents.

For example – one youth pointed out –

*Many of the youth are opium-smokers and smugglers in the country and their futures have been destroyed. However the least effective part of the government is narcotic drugs that the government couldn't prevent cultivation of narcotic drugs. Because they do not listen to what the youth problems are.*

*-Ghuncha, 17 years, Herat*

Some also pointed to broader issues of the government not listening to the youth –

*The government of Afghanistan doesn't pay attention to the people. The democracy that we see in Afghanistan is a compulsory democracy and it has arisen by western counties. The people who are in the head of government don't pay attention to the youth and their rights.*

*-Najibullah, 18 years, Kabul*

✓ **It should focus more on development**

During the focus group discussions, one respondent in Dasht-I Barchi district of Kabul opined:

*The government has been recognized to make efforts in construction of schools and providing health facilities and clinics.*

*-Imamuddin, 18 years, Kabul*

However, 60% respondents of the quantitative survey felt that the government still needs to focus on development. Of those who thought so, 56.8% were male and 43.2% were female. More youth in the urban areas (59.9%) rather than those in the rural areas (40.1%) felt the same.

*The government's activities have been effective in sport, teaching and training and education, but their activities haven't been effective in rural reconstruction and development; they haven't constructed flood protection wall (retaining wall), bridge and canals well.*

*-Emal Shah, 21 years, Kabul*

✓ **It should work more with national and international partners**

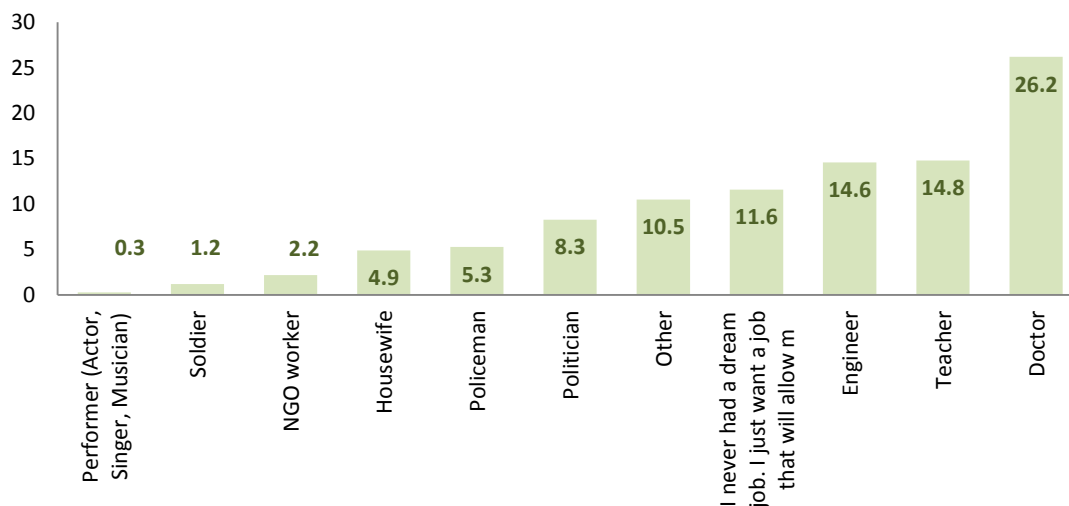
30.2% respondents felt that the government should work more with national and international partners whilst 69.7% felt that it should not. The four main provinces of Kabul, Balkh, Herat and Nangarhar in majority felt that the government should not work more with national and international actors whilst 59.3% of the respondents in Kandahar felt that it should work more with national and international actors. Though not by any means conclusive, the findings of the survey point towards youth in relatively prosperous and developed provinces, want the government to take more responsibility and stand up on its own feet whereas those in insecure provinces like Kandahar and Paktia (61%) want the government to work more with national and international actors.



## Professional goals

Professional aspirations voiced by respondents ranged from being a conventional doctor and engineer to becoming housewives and artists. The interesting finding, however, were the motivations that drove these professional aspirations. This section will highlight some of these aspirations and the motivations behind them, as well as how achievable these goals are.

Graph 30 - Professional aspirations of youth



### Being a doctor, engineer and a teacher

26.2% of the respondents said that they wanted to become a doctor, 14.8% a teacher and 14.6% an engineer. Qualitative research suggests that motivations for choosing these areas were a) high levels of income and prestige, and b) in the case of being a teacher – availability of job opportunities.

Qualitative interviews highlighted some interesting reasons for wanting to become a teacher. As one respondent pointed out –

*Now I want to become a teacher of Quran, because I see the youth that they pay attention to English more, but they don't pay attention to the Holy Quran. I want to attract their attention to the Holy Quran.*

*-Wajyah, 18 years, Balkh*

This quote again highlights that the forces of modernization and western culture for Afghan youth do not stand on the opposite end of the spectrum to Islamic values. One-on-one interviews with youth showed that they are trying to negotiate a space where both Islamic values and modernity have a role in their lives. This is relevant so as to not assume that the only positive change in a youth's life in Afghanistan is a modern one. Aspirations of the youth reflect that their ambitions are very much connected to their local environments. For example –

*I liked to become a doctor but my aim has changed, because many women are illiterate in our area and I want to become a teacher.*

*- Zahra, 20 years, Bamyan*

However, as it stands, only about 7% of students are studying in medical faculties. Education is a more achievable goal from a university perspective as 24% of students in government faculties in 2011-2012 were in education faculties<sup>153</sup>. One of the major challenges moving forward is limited number of university places: of the 150,000 high school graduates in 2011, 50% were unable to attend university the following year due to lack of spots<sup>154</sup>.

### **Being a Politician**

Those who wanted to be politicians came mostly from the 4 main provinces – Kabul, Herat, Balkh and Nangarhar. The majority of them (49.9%) were aged between 17 and 19 years of age and came from urban locations. Being a politician was connected with the preference for government jobs as a means of secure employment. It was also connected with an implicit assumption that being a politician meant being a leader, highlighting youth perceptions of who yields power in Afghan society. However, it was not clear whether these aspirations pertained to being politicians at the local levels – i.e. maliks, shura leaders and district leaders or at the national level – seeing themselves as ministers and the President. Anecdotal evidence suggests that it is a mixture of both, with aspirations being for the national level, but a more realistic aim being leaders at the local level. These aspirations were also predominant amongst men rather than women.

While current female parliamentarians are generally relatively young (between 30 and 45) highly educated, have work experience, and have frequently lived abroad, the paths to power have been more varied for men<sup>155</sup>. While some followed similar paths through tertiary education, others belonged to political groups for even fought jihad, which allowed them to become parliamentarians<sup>156</sup>.

### **Being a Housewife**

12% of the females interviewed, said that they wanted to be housewives. Of these women, 96.9% did not have a job whilst 2.3% do; 80.6% were illiterate and 53.5% were already married. These figures do not come as a surprise given that even now, many families do not allow their women to work after a certain age or after they get married.

*I like to be a good housewife and it is my aim; I am an illiterate person and I don't want to find a job.*

*-Bibi Gul, 19 years, Herat*

*I want to be a housewife and bring up my children well in the future. I am not interested in working.*

*- Rahela, 23 years, Kabul*

<sup>153</sup> CSO (2012), *Afghanistan Statistical Yearbook 2011-2012*, p. 56.

Medical faculties counted consist of "General Medical Facility," "Faculty of Medical Treatment;" Education faculties include "Faculty of Education," "Faculty of Education and Psychology" and "Faculty of Specialized Education"

<sup>154</sup> The World Bank (2013), *Higher Education In Afghanistan*, p. 19

<sup>155</sup> Fleschenberg, Andrea / Heinrich Böll Stiftung (2009), *Afghanistan's parliament in the making: Gendered understandings and practices of politics in a transitional country*, Kabul, p. 90

<sup>156</sup> Fleschenberg, Andrea (2009), *Afghanistan's parliament in the making*, p. 133

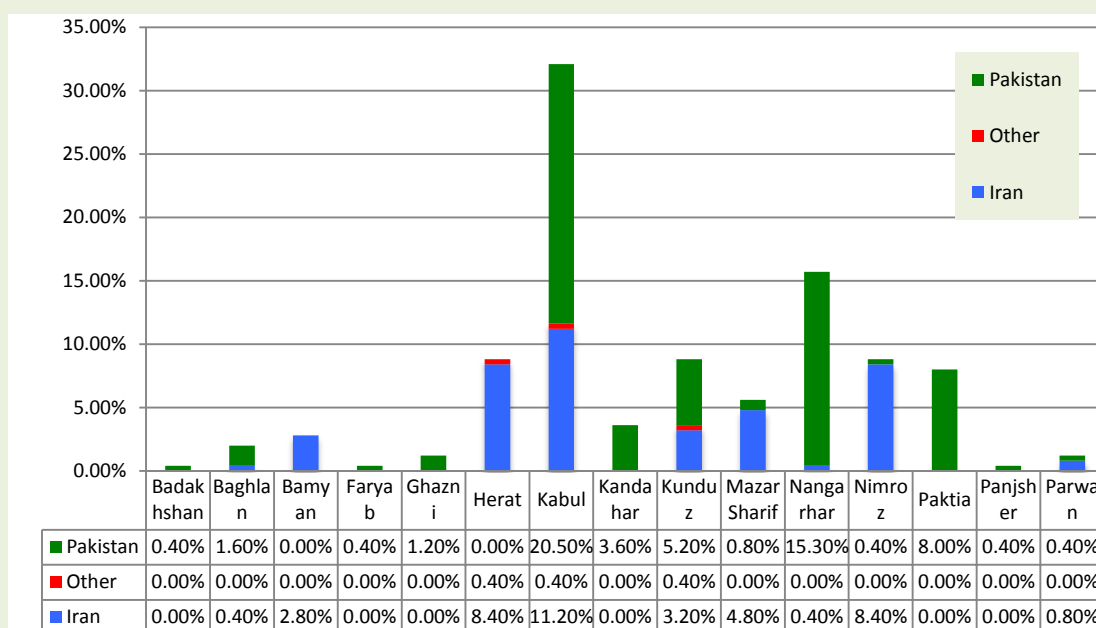
**Being a Soldier**

Only 1.2% of the total sample wanted to become a soldier. Focus group interviews suggested that those who did join, were motivated to do so in order to defend their country. Of those who wanted to be a soldier, 60% were literate having been to school. The majority (57.6%) were aged between 17 and 19 years whilst 12% were aged just 15 years. The number of those wanting to be a soldier reduced as the age of the respondent increased presumably because they were either too old to enlist or had other jobs. 48.5% of them were in Kabul, 15% in Kandahar and 12.1% in Nangarhar. Unsurprisingly 97% of them were male and only 3 % were female and 72.7% considered the priority role of the youth to be in the security sector.

### Box 6 – Migration in the lives of the Afghan Youth

The majority of respondents surveyed were born in Afghanistan. However, foreign-born Afghans are a strong minority. In Kabul, 20.5% of the respondents were born in Pakistan and 11.2% were born in Iran. In Paktia and Nangarhar, 8% and 15.3% of the respondents respectively were born in Pakistan. In Kandahar, 3.6% of the respondents were born in Pakistan. In the western provinces like Herat and Nimroz, 8.4% respondents each were born in Iran. Graph 2 shows the percentage of people born outside of Afghanistan according to the province in which they were interviewed.

**Graph 31 - Provincial data for youth born outside of Afghanistan**



**Born in Afghanistan:** Of the respondents born in Afghanistan, 68.3% were aged between 15-19 years. This means that they were born between the years of 1994-1998 – at the time of Taliban rule. The survey indicates that 20.4% of those who were born in Afghanistan were returned refugees implying that they migrated back to a country they had not known.

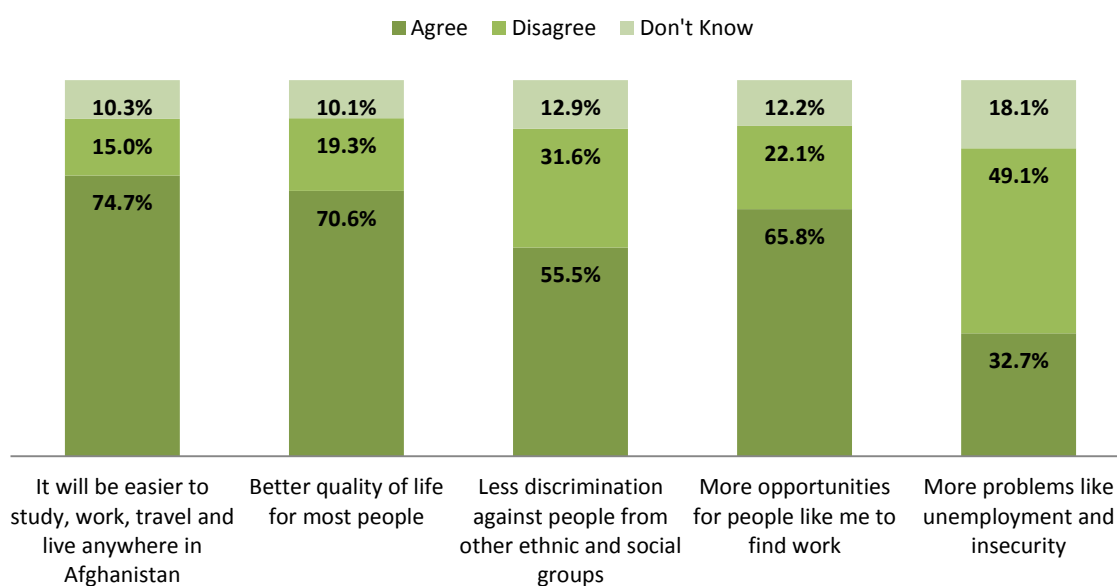
**Born outside Afghanistan:** In this sample, a number of youth who were born outside of Afghanistan live in Kabul implying that a) upon their return their households preferred to come to live in Kabul rather than their places of origin, or b) their place of origin was Kabul meaning that a number of people migrated from Kabul to Pakistan or Iran and then came back. It could also be a combination of the two above. Lack of data has made it difficult to clearly know the multi-dimensional impact of migration on young people. Dangers of traveling, discrimination, instability, exclusion, and lack of documentation are only few of the negative impacts that migration can have on young people. At the same time, the positive contributions of the Iranian and Pakistani educational systems on the education of youth – whether through formal schools in Iran or refugee schools in Pakistan – has meant that the second-generation refugees have benefited in their childhood development and have returned with different mind-sets and experiences than their non-migrant Afghan counterparts. Anecdotal evidence suggests that despite a desire to live in Afghanistan, there is a strong urge, at least among young men and women, to go back to countries like Iran and Pakistan where they claimed to have had a better education and more freedom. Migration will not only have an impact on the current lives of Afghan youth, but will inform their migration decisions in the future.

## Looking ahead: Expectations of the future

When the youth were asked what they thought would be the situation in Afghanistan in 10 years, the response generated was mostly positive. Most of the respondents felt that it would be easier to study, work, travel and live anywhere in Afghanistan, there would be better quality of life for most people, more opportunities for young people to find work and more equality between men and women. Yet, a sobering 32.7% of the respondents said that they felt there would be more problems of unemployment and insecurity after 10 years. This is consistent with the Asia Foundation’s findings about Afghans as a whole, as 31% of respondents think that “things are moving in the wrong direction.”<sup>157</sup> While this may seem like a large proportion of respondents, as a point of comparison, 26% of interviewed youth (18-24) in the United Kingdom reported being “fairly” or “very” pessimistic about the future<sup>158</sup> in their own country.

Another key finding was that consistently, women were less optimistic of the future than men. The next sections will develop these optimistic and pessimistic findings in more detail.

Graph 32 - Afghanistan in 10 years time



### 3.2.1.4 The Optimistic Youth

Those who were optimistic about the country’s future voiced their optimism in areas like employment, security and travel.

#### “It will be easier to live, work and travel freely in Afghanistan”

74.7% of the respondents said that they think that in ten years time, it will be easier to study, work, travel and live anywhere in Afghanistan. 15% disagreed with this statement whilst 10.3% did not

<sup>157</sup> Asia Foundation (2012), *A Survey of the Afghan People*, p. 27

<sup>158</sup> YouGov/ The Sun (2013), *Youth Survey Results*, p. 1

know. More males (49.0%) agreed that things will be better whilst only 25.7% women agreed with the above statement. 44.6% in urban areas thought that it will be easier to negotiate life in Afghanistan in 10 years than the 30.1% in rural areas who thought the same.

**“We will have a better quality of life”**

Amongst all respondents, 70.6% were of the view that the quality of life will improve in the next 10 years. 19.3% thought otherwise whilst 10.1% did not have an opinion. 15% of the youth living in urban areas felt that the quality of life would not get better as opposed to the 10% in rural areas. The number of females who felt that their quality of life would become better was also lower than the number of men who thought the same. Overall however, more women thought that quality of life would get better than the 9.5% who thought it would not.

**“There will be less discrimination against other ethnic and social groups”**

Responses were less evidently positive compared to other scenarios when asked whether discrimination against other ethnic and social groups would reduce. Only 55.5% said that they agreed with the statement, whilst 31.6% felt discrimination against other ethnic and social groups would not reduce. 19.3% male respondents and 12.3% female respondents felt that discrimination would continue. This feeling was also more prevalent in urban areas (18.7%) than rural areas (12.9%). That being said, 37.3% men and 18.2% women felt that indeed in 10 years time, there would be less discrimination.

**“There will be more opportunities for people like me to find work”**

65.8% of the respondents felt that in 10 years time, there would be more opportunities for people like them to find work. 22.1% disagreed with the statement whilst 12.2% did not know. 42% male respondents felt that they would have better opportunities whilst only 23% women felt the same. Youth in urban areas were also more hopeful of improvement in available opportunities than in rural areas.

**3.2.1.5 The pessimistic youth**

There were a number of recurring themes among those who had concerns about Afghanistan’s future: unemployment, insecurity and corruption.

**“There will be more problems like unemployment and insecurity”**

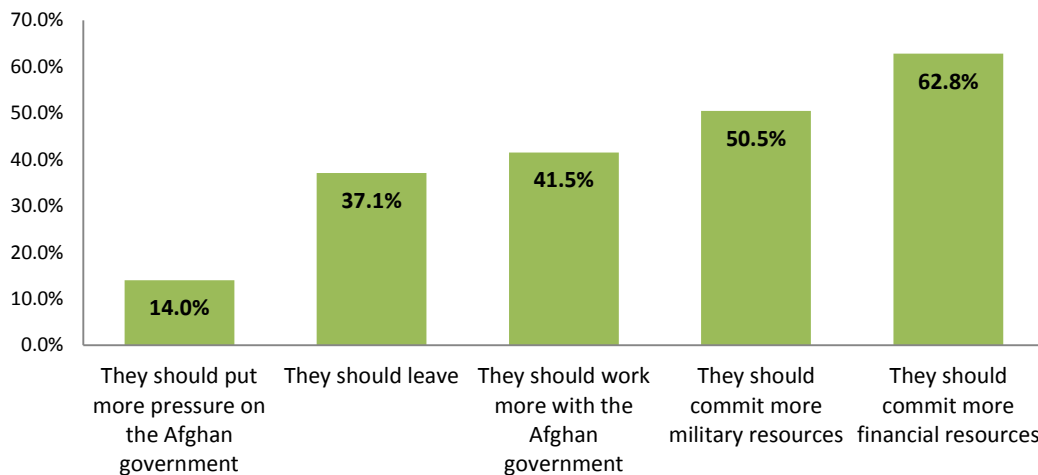
32.7% respondents felt that there would be more problems like unemployment and insecurity in 10 years time than 49.1% who disagreed with the statement. 18.1% did not have an opinion on the statement. Though the number of men who disagreed with the statement was more than those who agreed with it, such was not the case with women. 14.5% women felt that there would be more problems like unemployment and insecurity whilst 14% felt that this would not be the case. A slight majority of the respondents in Kandahar 42.1% also agreed with the statement whilst 40.7% said that this would not be the case. Surprisingly, 59% people within Bamyan felt that there would be more problems like unemployment and insecurity. Rising insecurity and the relative rural nature of Bamyan, ensconced within the central highlands may be a factor in this finding. Ghazni was the other province where responses were more pessimistic about the future. Given these concerns,

youths have certain expectations from the government and the international community. These expectations range from what the government should do and not do and what should be the role of the international community in determining the future of Afghanistan.

## Expectations from the International Community

Attached in equal measure are also expectations from the international community. When asked about what they thought the international community should do in Afghanistan, 62.8% of the respondents said that the international community should commit more financial resources to Afghanistan. 50.5% of the respondents said that they should commit more military resources whilst 41.6% said that they should work more with the Afghan government. 37.1% were of the opinion that the international community should leave.

Graph 33 - Expectations from the international community



### ✓ They should commit more financial resources to Afghanistan

63.8% male and 36.2% female respondents said that the international community should commit more financial resources to Afghanistan – the majority of these were in the urban areas. Of the people interviewed who were aged over 25 years, 74.9% felt that they should commit more financial resources. These are the people who are in the job market presently and will be affected most by the impact of transition, as they will soon be transitioning to being the key income generating members of their families if they are not so already.

### ✓ They should commit more military resources to Afghanistan

The respondents were almost evenly divided between thinking whether the international community should commit more military resources (50.5%) to Afghanistan or not (49.4%). Opinions on this were also evenly divided between urban and rural locations – with 49.7% in urban areas and 49.1% in rural areas saying that the international community should not commit more military resources to Afghanistan.



Noticeably, in the northern provinces of Badakhshan, Kunduz and Balkh, a majority of the people thought that more military resources should not be committed whilst in provinces in the south and south eastern regions of the country – Kandahar, Nimroz and Paktia, respondents felt that there is a need of more military resources. These are provinces that have already seen a huge presence of international military and are also the most insecure provinces in the sampling for this survey. This finding highlights that in the insecure provinces, youth still rely on international forces to maintain security.

This could also be because the contrast between the capacity of ANA in these provinces is starker in comparison to the international forces. As the quote below from Paktia shows:

*The ANSF can't protect Afghanistan because they don't have facilities and military equipment and they don't have union and alliance between each other.*

*- Sarah Jan, 16 years, Paktia*

Another aspect of this is the involvement of international countries in the level of insecurity as well. As one youth pointed out:

*Yes, the ANSF can protect Afghanistan, if the neighbor countries don't interfere in our country. the local police aren't good because they don't work honestly, but the ANA are beneficial to the country, if they are literate people.*

*-Yunus, 22 years, Bamyān*

✓ **They should work more with the Afghan government**

58.2% of the respondents felt that the international community should not work more with the Afghan government and 41.6% felt that they should. Of these, the majority were male living in urban areas. Provinces where the youth felt that the international community should work with the Afghan government were Faryab, Kabul, Kandahar, Nimroz, Paktia and Panjshir. In all the other provinces, namely – Badakhshan, Baghlan, Bamyān, Ghazni, Herat, Kunduz, Balkh, Nangarhar, and Parwan, majority of the respondents felt that the international community does not need to work with the Afghan government anymore.

✓ **They should leave**

37.1% of the respondents felt that the international community should leave. Majority of those who said they should leave were male (52.2%); 47.8% of the female respondents were of the same view.

The quote below, points to the reasons why some youth feel disenfranchised with the international community:

*The least effective part of the government is foreign organizations and offices, because they work what they want and don't pay attention to the people's ideas.*

*-Gul Ahmad, 22 years, Faryab*

Provinces where the youth felt that the international community should leave were Badakhshan, Baghlan, Ghazni, Herat, Nangarhar, Nimroz and Parwan whilst those where the youth felt that the international community should stay were Bamyan, Faryab, Kabul, Kandahar, Kunduz, Paktia and Panjshir. This is in line with the findings above – those in insecure provinces like Kandahar and Paktia want the international community to be more involved in the reconstruction of Afghanistan over the coming years. These are also the most vulnerable provinces in terms of security and economic development.

✓ **They should put more pressure on the Afghan government**

Only 14% of the respondents felt that the international community should put more pressure on the Afghan government. Of these, the majority were in Kabul (27.2%), Badakhshan (19.7%), Kunduz (13.7%) and in Kandahar (9.2%).

The discussion above has painted a complex picture of youth expectations from the future, their government and the international community. Opinions are by no means unanimous. Indeed they strongly reflect socio-economic and security conditions in the provinces in which the youth live; indicating that in order to empower the youth, policy makers must first adapt to a local context, before aiming for a national outreach.

## **Conclusions on the Perceptions, Attitudes, Expectations and Aspirations of the Afghan Youth**

The discussion above has highlighted some key aspects of how youth define society in Afghanistan:

**Generational Gap:** There is an increasing perception amongst the youth, more so in urban areas that their opinions are always secondary to those of elders in their families, communities and even at the national level. Some in Kabul have also felt actively side-lined by the interests of people who are older than them.

**Connecting concept with reality:** For many, human rights and nationalism are mere concepts, as are subjects like peace-building and conflict resolution; the main reason for it being a lack of means with which to see how they are manifest in their daily lives.

**Negotiations between Islam and Modernity:** Afghan youth are also in the process of negotiating a space where tenets of Islam meet modernity. Repeated evidence suggests that on subjects like human rights and nationalism, as also equality between men and women, youth are not polarized between being modern in a western sense of the word. Nor are they entirely Islamic. What they are trying to do is to merge the two in order to find common ground.

**What informs youth opinions varies according to the type of location and gender:** At the start of this chapter, it was mentioned that opinions are based on lived experience and availability of information. Disparity in opinions and awareness amongst youth was found to be different between rural and urban youth and between men and women.

**Youth are debating and discussing:** This chapter has also showed that the opinions that the youth have, and their aspirations come from a grounding in their lived experience. Those who have access to information however, are questioning their role, the role of the government and that of the international community. They are also thinking about the position between men and women in Afghan society. All of this points to a hope both for youth at large, but also specifically for those who have not had exposure to information or are able to make informed choices. This is because youth who are thinking critically can catalyze the change for those who are not in a position to do so.

**Youth are for Afghanistan:** Whether it is a question of moving abroad or Afghanistan's future, the youth still favour their country over anything else. This is perhaps the biggest opportunity that can present itself to policy makers. With having the power to shape sectors like education, health and employment, the willingness of youth offers the chance to turn this demographic group into the engines of Afghanistan's reconstruction wagon.

### Box 7 – Creative youth initiatives in Kabul

Kabul is increasingly becoming a hub for creative youth initiatives wherein they are trying to voice their opinions and channel their creative energies through unconventional programmes. These programmes are yet to reach the provinces in a strong way, but having an upsurge in Kabul, is a good beginning.

#### **MUSIC**

Afghan youth are expanding the country's musical scene. Musical institutes, from the well-known Afghanistan Institute of Music to localized music courses, are experiencing a growing Afghan audience and increasing acceptance for musical performances. Bands playing indie rock, metal, and other musical genres are performing in major cities and, while cultural restrictions still exist, audiences are growing.

#### **VISUAL & PERFORMING ARTS**

Afghanistan's long history of visual arts is experiencing new mediums and forms via new initiatives targeting youth such as the Center for Contemporary Art in Afghanistan. International centres, such as the French Institute of Afghanistan (IFA), attract both local and foreign audiences to see Afghans from throughout the country display not only artwork and photography, but also perform plays, as pictured.

#### **POLITICS & DEBATE**

Youth political movements are growing at a rapid pace in major Afghan cities. Groups' composition varies; likewise, their goals range from specifying specific societal issues to committing to general philosophies. Recently, Charsada – a group of young Afghans who maintain X, entered the political scene. Other organizations, such as Afghans for Progressive Thinking, do not subscribe to political ideologies but encourage political discussion and debate by holding tournaments between debaters from around the country. One young Afghan interviewed organized peace building and reconciliation activities between different tribes in his home province of Paktia, noting that only the youth are capable of "letting go of the past and effecting change. The future – whether it's peace or war – will come from the youth."

#### **MEDIA**

Young Afghans are leading the country's media scenes, with more students graduating with journalism degrees than ever before. Organizations like Internews and Salam Watandar hold programming specifically for youth. Others like Rumi provide media trainings for youth, hoping to give young people the tools they need to be successful advocates in the future. The advent of renewed international media attention to Afghanistan brought with it the training and development of young Afghan journalists, now able to broaden their skills and reach for an international and national audience. Internet clubs are increasing in number in major cities, and the availability of access to the media and media tools are providing ordinary Afghans a venue to voice their opinions, stories and more.



## 4. NATIONAL YOUTH STRATEGY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

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Young people in Afghanistan are facing a complex and dual transition process – their own transition to adulthood, and their country’s political and military transition in 2014. CSO in 2013 estimates Afghan youth (under the age of 25) at 63% of the population of Afghanistan. During the course of the fieldwork, it was observed that a person falling within the 15-17 age bracket was recognized as being a *jawan*. Beyond this age group, perceptions changed for men and women. While for women, 18-20 are considered to be crucial years for finding a husband, for men, this is a phase of transition to higher education or early employment. Youth aged 20 years and above show a varied picture between urban and rural landscapes. Whilst in the urban areas, a number of youth are engaged in some form of higher education, those in rural areas are largely involved in domestic and family work.

As a result, education and training are extended for some – those who do not dropout during their primary school years and who have a greater access to higher education – while the working age starts relatively early for all, who have responsibilities to their families and new households. All in all, youth must navigate their life trajectories in highly collective ways – dependant on families for support, livelihoods and networks to get started.

The Afghan youth surveyed do not anticipate a greater voice at the local or national level. They seem used to the fact that their parents, elders and leaders do not value them to their fullest capacity. This is where an opportunity lies – at the central, sub-national and local levels – to bridge the gap between the youth and the rest of society – whether their elders, their employers, their teachers or their political leaders, through a National Youth Policy. This will be especially relevant at a time of upcoming elections – how to go beyond using the youth, to actually building space for the youth to become more active, as a force for positive social, political and economic change?

The consultation process in this survey showed that the Afghan youths have the desire to:

- Be a greater voice in a collective society
- Do something for their communities
- Achieve a better socioeconomic status
- Pursue higher education
- Get involved in politics and
- Serve their country.

Afghan youth need targeted policies for livelihood and skills-building programs that currently do not exist in an Afghanistan where development responses have been horizontal – attempting to capture the largest groups – rather that vertical – addressing the needs of specific groups. The recommendations for a National Youth Policy in this section will bridge the gap between the profiles (Chapter 2) and beliefs, attitudes and aspirations (Chapter 3) of the Afghan youth. This comes with a set of obligations for all, specific privileges for youth. Before delving into the components of a National Youth Strategy, the next section will provide an overview of current youth interventions.



## 4.1 Current youth interventions – An overview

There is an opportunity to develop youth-sensitive development policies at a time when these are becoming scarce. The years 2007-2010 saw a burgeoning of youth-based initiatives, with the UNDP-led Joint National Youth Programme (JNYP), a USAID-funded Skills Training for Afghan Youth (STAY+) program, and UNHABITAT's Youth Empowerment Project (YEP). A gap has now been left, while three key critical areas remain the development of youth in Afghanistan, namely: education, employment and civil society/civic engagement.

Universities have overall little capacity and the quality of education is often compromised for quantity, with a flourishing sector of private higher education. Civil society organizations that can provide a platform to the voice of youth are present only in a handful of cities in the country, and not sufficiently active. Vocational training that is provided supply-based rather than demand driven, evidenced by the fact that there has never been a comprehensive labour market assessment done in Afghanistan.<sup>159</sup> Non-agriculture based, services jobs that are available in the country are available primarily to those living in or close to urban areas. Features of a modernizing economy – and of increasing insecurity – mean that a number of Afghan youth migrate from rural areas to regional urban centres like Kabul, Jalalabad, Mazar-e Sharif and Herat. When international forces withdraw and funding shrinks, the impact will be felt most in urban areas making the urban youth, a new vulnerable category<sup>160</sup>.

From the government's side, a ministry dedicated to Youth Affairs was established in 2005. In 2006, this ministry was seconded to the Ministry of Information and Culture. The deputy ministry, now called the Deputy Ministry of Youth Affairs (DMoYA) supervises its provincial sub-directorates under the Directorates of Information and Culture at the sub-national level. DMoYA does not have its own development budget to implement programmes. It partners with UNDP, UNHABITAT and UNICEF, to implement programmes for the youth. That being said, youth are a crosscutting category across various sectors. Ministries like MoLSAMD, MRRD through the NSP or the Ministry of Education, often work as well with the youth. However, a comprehensive approach to address the challenges of the youth is lacking.

The main programme to have been implemented specifically targeting the youth was JNYP. The programme, a collaboration between 8 Afghan ministries and 7 UN agencies, aimed at strengthening the capacity of the Government to respond to the needs of the youth by promoting non-formal education, increasing awareness and developing skills (literacy, leadership, strategic planning, conflict resolution, peace-building, etc.) in young people so to provide better quality of life and livelihood opportunities, engaging youth in governance, development and social-political processes at local, district, municipal, provincial and national level, ensuring the participation of young women and men in democracy and advocacy and promoting volunteerism for peace and development and establishing a youth volunteer corps for Afghanistan. Due to ambitious objectives, lack of base-line

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<sup>159</sup> Key Informant Interview with ILO representative, Kabul, Afghanistan

<sup>160</sup> In its *Transition in Afghanistan, looking beyond 2014* presentation of November 2011, the World Bank already warned of a recession in the crucial transition year of 2014 and of serious fiscal gaps (up to US\$ 7 billion or € 5.3 billion) until at least 2021. It also posits that a slowdown in aid will be felt more in acute-conflicted affected areas than others



data, coordination issues and a lack of resources, this programme was not renewed beyond 2009. Instead, the National Institution Building Programme, also funded by UNDP, was tasked with building the capacity of DMoYA. Beyond this, NGOs like NRC, Action Aid and Mercy Corps, as well as private agencies like Internews, have been implementing programmes for the development of youth – an increasing focus of NGO interventions in 2013.

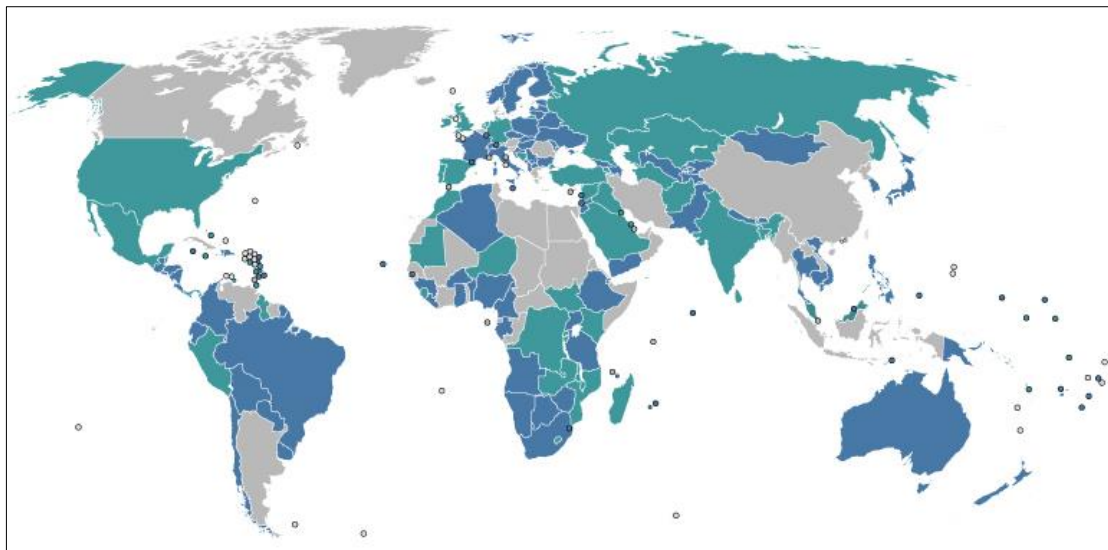
## 4.2 Content of the Afghanistan National Youth Policy

Globally, out of 198 countries in the world<sup>161</sup>:

- ✓ 99 countries – 50% - currently have a national youth policy.
- ✓ 56 countries – 28% - are revising their existing national youth policy or developing their first national youth policy
- ✓ 43 countries – 22% - have no national policy as of yet. Of those, 17 are in Africa, 12 in Asia, 9 in Europe and 5 in the Americas.

**Figure 2 - National Youth Policies (NYP) Globally [January 2013]**

In blue: NYP exists green: NYP under revision; grey: no NYP.



Source – [www.youthpolicy.org/nationalyouthpolicies](http://www.youthpolicy.org/nationalyouthpolicies)

These figures can now be updated to include Afghanistan as one of the countries in the world adopting a National Youth Policy. In Afghanistan, in a process that is government-owned, a national youth policy draft has been developed and has been submitted for approval at the time of the drafting of this report. The subsequent process of developing a National Youth Strategy now begins under the leadership of the Government of Afghanistan and with the support of the international community. The remaining sections of this chapter provide an overview of the Afghanistan National Youth Policy and concrete and actionable recommendations for the National Youth Strategy.

<sup>161</sup> <http://www.youthpolicy.org/nationalyouthpolicies/>

### 4.3 Objectives of the Afghanistan National Youth Policy

In 2013, under the leadership of the Ministry of Information and Culture's Office of the Deputy Ministry of Youth Affairs, and with the participation of all 13 line ministries, The Afghanistan National Youth Policy has been developed. The policy aims at serving the following purposes:

1. Promote youth as a strategic priority target group for Afghanistan's overall development and poverty reduction strategies;
2. Identify priority youth issues and provide the legal framework and strategic direction for sustainable youth development,
3. Identify gaps in existing youth related research, policies and programmes and provide a common framework for addressing these gaps,
4. Acknowledge the distinctive and complementary role of governments, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), the private sector and youth organizations in youth development and intends to provide a framework for common goals and the development of a spirit of cooperation between these groups,
5. Intend to strengthen the coordination between the various governmental and non-governmental actors involved in youth related issues,
6. Provide a framework for designing and implementing a monitoring mechanism to improve and strengthen youth related programmes and interventions, and
7. Promote opportunities for political, economic, social and cultural youth participation at the national, sub-national and local level.

Key Policy interventions identified fall within the following sectors:

1. Youth employment
2. Adolescent and youth health
3. Education and training
4. Participation
5. Cross-cutting issues:
  - a. Gender equality
  - b. Peace and security
  - c. Sports and recreation
  - d. Environmental sustainability

## 4.4 Prerequisites and Priority Targets

Unlike other countries, the youth in Afghanistan are geographically, socially and economically fragmented on a unique scale due to the ongoing insecurity and conflict. They lack the means of communication available to youths in other countries because of low literacy levels, remoteness, lack of infrastructure and limited internet access. Fundamentally, they lack a homogenous and universal medium for communication – they have entirely different reference paradigms for their lives. A strategy for the youth needs to take into account this varied nature and be clear on definitions, and then divide up the tasks ahead. Setting realistic aims will be crucial - the government cannot provide a job to every single youth in the country, nor can it ensure that every single youth can and will go to school given the size of the country and the capacity of the government. It needs realistic aims; first, however, is the need for a National Youth Policy to be clear on definitions and target groups.

### Definition of Youth – By Age Bracket

As detailed in the Afghanistan National Youth Policy (ANYP), a youth is defined as a person who is between the age of 18 and 30. However, the ANYP also provides a specific programming focus for adolescents (13 to 18 years of age) based on the understanding that in many sectors, such as health and education, the return on investment is particularly high when made at earlier stages of life.

The research team used the 15-25 year age bracket for this study, as explained in the methodology, which can further help fine-tune the approach in the National Youth Strategy. The findings from this study show that all youth within this age group are unlikely to share the same profiles, attitudes and aspirations, with different roles and responsibilities within their families and societies. It is necessary to divide three sub-groups:

**15 – 17 years**, this first sub-group covers adolescents whose needs are focused on ensuring a proper secondary school education is completed, information is shared on higher education possibilities, scholarships made available, and families targeted for a collective decision making to nurture the academic development of youth.

For those who are out of school drop-outs, a high percentage of which drop-out during the primary school years as seen in this study, there is still an opportunity to bring them back to the educational system – late entrants are not unusual in Afghanistan after three decades of war and migration. The government should target those youth workers who have nothing to do or who engage in unproductive activities, who take odd jobs to support their families such as street work. In these cases, a campaign targeting the reinsertion in primary and secondary education of these drop-outs would give them a second chance at social and economic development.

**18 – 21 years**, this second sub-group covers youth who are in the process of completing their education, are university-aged and hence are either enrolled in a private or public university or are at the start of their professional lives. Targeted assistance at this stage requires focusing on information sharing on job opportunities, vocational and qualification training courses that can be

undergone at the same time as part-time or often unstable jobs, with mentoring schemes targeted to them.

**22 – 25 years**, this third sub-group of the Afghan youth corresponds to those who are settled in their personal lives (as heads of households or spouse in a new household), who are less flexible on options offered to them but who still require continued training and professional mentoring to escape from an employment pattern that is mainly insecure.

## Reaching out to the Youth – Priority Target Groups

The ANYP identifies youth groups as targeted beneficiaries based on their social and economic needs. As such it identifies the following youth groups<sup>162</sup>:

1. Young women and girls;
2. Young women and men living in poverty;
3. Unemployed and underemployed youth and young workers in vulnerable forms of employment;
4. Youth without access to education and out-of-school youth;
5. Adolescent and youth without access to health services;
6. Youth living with HIV/AIDS and chronic diseases;
7. Young persons with disabilities;
8. Young with drug addiction;
9. Young victims of violence, including gender-based violence;
10. Rural youth;
11. Migrant youth;
12. Extremist youth; and
13. Orphans and young people living on the street;
14. Marginalized youth;
15. Athletes.

Based on the findings of this research, and to inform the upcoming National Youth Strategy, the following key issues can be further elaborated upon:

- ✓ The urban-rural divide
- ✓ The gender lens
- ✓ The socially and economically disadvantaged
- ✓ The migrants and the displaced
- ✓ The potential leaders of tomorrow

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<sup>162</sup> GIRoA (2013), *DRAFT Afghanistan National Youth Policy*, 24 November 2013, DMoYA, Kabul.

### *The urban-rural divide*

When assessing the Afghan youth, one should keep in mind that **76%** of the Afghan population live in rural areas<sup>163</sup>.

- ✓ **Rural youth** form a larger share of the youth population but have comparatively lesser access to information, educational and training opportunities.
  - The programmes that they have the most information about are community-based development programs such as the National Solidarity Programme (NSP), or sector-based initiatives like the Basic Package of Health Services (BPHS). However, they are not aware of youth-specific initiatives.
  - The booming services sector and telecom sector in Afghanistan has to some extent impacted their lives positively – however they are not active participants in such economic development. The youth in rural areas are predominantly agrarian-based in their activities.
  
- ✓ **Urban youth** provide a rich resource for further educational development – but are also at risk of unemployed upon graduation from high school and university, not being able to find a place in an increasingly competitive – and shrinking – urban labour market. Their frustrations can be high. The urban youth are characterized by:
  - Their engagement in some form of higher education, either through public or private universities and training centres, although they may not have an opportunity to work after their graduation
  - Bilingual (Dari/Pashto) and multilingual skills (Dari, Pashto and English), highlighting a greater emphasis and learning curve of languages in urban schools
  - Twice more likely to have received full immunization as children than their rural counterparts, but with higher rates of reported psychological or counselling support needs for urban youth
    - Those living in urban areas are generally more educated and have more access to outreach programmes, thus increasing their awareness of issues dealing with drug use and abuse, physical and psychological health, and reproductive health, which contributes to this greater awareness of health-related needs.

### *The gender lens*

Many of the government's national objectives require fundamental behavioural change – attitudes towards women and gender are a good example. The youth are clearly the most important component any long term, sustainable strategy for encouraging attitudinal and behavioural change. Beyond the urban-rural divide, the National Youth Strategy will need to address the gender divide, in subtle but long-standing ways.

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<sup>163</sup> World Bank – World Development Indicators: <http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.URB.TOTL.IN.ZS>

For instance, this study finds that young women have started female youth groups at the village and district level in order to get the voices of women heard, especially in Nangarhar. Policy makers can access these youth directly and provide them with resources and opportunities that will provide them with a stepping-stone to achieve their aspirations.

Those individuals, who have had no access to education, are severely restricted by socio-cultural norms and/or come from a socio-economic environment where they have not had access to information. In Afghanistan, this would comprise a number of women who come from very conservative socio-cultural backgrounds and have been unable to get an education or permission to work and/or be involved beyond the domestic sphere of their families.

**Shabana, 18 years old, Female**

- Lives in a rural district of Kandahar and is engaged to be married
- Illiterate with some ability to speak Pashto, but no reading or writing skills
- Was not allowed to go to school by her family for non-financial reasons
- Extremely-low income household, family has to borrow money and sell assets in order to survive
- Received vocational training in sewing and embroidery, but not allowed to find a job by her family – lack of possibility of follow-up post-training
- Does not like to play any kind of sport
- Does not wish to do any kind of voluntary, unpaid community work
- Did not have a dream job nor prioritized any areas where she felt the youth of Afghanistan could contribute

*“ I think the government of Afghanistan has been very successful in the country and the security situation of the country is also very good”*

***The socially and economically (dis)advantaged***

A National Youth Policy will need to take into account the socio-economically advantaged youth, as the disadvantaged ones, with two different strategic angles. The profile of Farooq below is a prime example of a success story of a self-sustaining young man from urban Ghazni, with high hopes for the future of his country. Development-led policies for youth should capitalize on the strengths of similar Afghan youth who are capable – with educational and employment capabilities – to bring about change, as leaders, in their societies. These are the future leaders of Afghan society – who think their voices can be heard.

**Farooq, 23 years old, male**

- Lives in Ghazni city in a 15 member household
- Completed public university, including vocational training in computer and IT
- One of 5 income generators in the family
- Family does not need a coping strategy
- Works in an international organization/NGO
- Does not feel that he can change the security situation in the country
- Thinks that the opinions of youth are valued in Afghan society

*“I think it will be easier to work, live and travel in Afghanistan after 10 years time and there will be more equality between men and women. I think the Afghan government has been somewhat successful and the international community should work more with the Afghan government”.*

The majority however remain socio-economically disadvantaged – and should be the focus of clearly targeted programs focusing on education, vocational and qualification training, and counselling/mentoring support. Whether they live in urban slums or rural remote villages, their needs should be addressed specifically through the National Youth Strategy.

## *The migrants and the displaced*

In the past ten years, refugee return and internal displacement have caused rapid urbanization rates in Afghanistan's main cities. The phenomenon of urban migration is not new: it follows economic development and demographic transition trends<sup>164</sup>. In only six years, Kabul experienced a three-fold increase of its population, from 1.5 million in 2001 to 4.5 million in 2007, and estimates reaching over 5 million people today. It has been termed "one of the fastest growing cities in the region"<sup>165</sup>.

Afghanistan's capital city and other urban centers are likely to continue expanding for the foreseeable future with security and living conditions deteriorating in the rural areas. These urban centers are characterized by an urban growth rate of 5.4% annually and a doubling of the population over the next 7 years<sup>166</sup>.

There are broadly three different types of influx of displaced persons to cities which can be grouped under the broader term of urban displacement: (1) returnees who came to settle directly to cities upon their return, (2) returnees who went to their areas of origin and were then forced to move again, in a pattern of secondary displacement, to the cities; (3) and internally displaced persons, which include conflict-induced, natural-disaster induced displacement and also poverty-induced displacement.

Returning refugees – especially second-generation born outside of Afghanistan – come back with educational and professional skills that may be adapted to the Afghan context. They have a potential to contribute to the country's development, having been exposed to a different way of life, learning other trades, and representatives of a new multiculturalism that should increasingly be seen as a resource for Afghanistan. With over 6 million refugees returning since 2002 (UNHCR) the potential of returnees is considerable and should be tapped into for the National Youth Strategy. An example is Soheila, 20 years old:

### **Soheila, 20 years old**

- Graduated high school in Peshawar.
- Comes from a female-headed household in a household of 4.
- Sole income generator of the family
- Enrolled in a professional course in a major urban city of Afghanistan
- Had to find a job at the age 18 years to support her family
- Started her own association at the age of 19 to provide support for women and disabled people
- Now works with a major INGO along with managing her own association

*"Children are too young. But youth have the knowledge. They know what they want. The main factor that a country stands on is youth – who can bring new ideas and new technologies. Young men make the cars and other things. The older generation has ideas but they don't know the ways in which they can use their ideas. Where as the youth can help the old generations implement their ideas".*

Another category is that of internally displaced persons (IDPs) who live in informal settlements in urban areas or scattered around rural areas of the country. A National IDP policy is being finalized in the summer 2013 – and could constitute a link to cross-sectoral efforts to combine youth-based

<sup>164</sup> Majidi, N. (2011), *Urban Returnees and Internally Displaced Persons in Afghanistan*, MEI-FRS, January 2011.

<sup>165</sup> Beall, J. Esser, D. (2005) *Shaping Urban Futures: Challenges to Governing and Managing Afghan Cities*, AREU.

<sup>166</sup> Statistics provided by UNHABITAT (Kabul, July 15, 2010).

initiatives with the needs of specific vulnerable groups. A recent study *Challenges of IDP protection in Afghanistan*<sup>167</sup>, highlighted the need for further research on vulnerabilities for IDP youth populations. As a result, the Norwegian Refugee Council in 2013 has plans to commission a study on the urban displaced youth of Afghanistan. This is the type of evidence-based research that can feed into a National Youth Strategy for the country.

### *The potential leaders of tomorrow*

By 2003, UNDP reported 105 youth organisations had been established within Afghanistan. In 2010, an Afghan Youth Voices Festival was launched across 16 provinces as a lead up to the International Youth Day on 12 August 2010. The goal of the festival was to provide a training ground and medium of expression for Afghan youth through the media – radio, television, internet, blogs, photography, posters, art and music.

Youth In Action Association (YIAA) is a youth-led grassroots youth organisation that carries out activities related to policy advocacy, sustainable employment generation and peace-building. YIAA has been active in organising small youth events such as World Blood Donor Day, World Environment Day, and Global Youth Service Day. The Afghan Youth Civil and Cultural Association (AYCCA) focuses on volunteer work and working with other Afghan civil society organisations to promote human rights in Afghanistan.

Many of these initiatives are implemented by civil society organizations on a local scale or by UN agencies – these should remain outside of government interference for increased independence and neutrality, to avoid a politicisation of Afghan youth initiatives. The government’s role should be to ensure the appropriate space for such initiatives to be created and fostered.

*I am Ahmad Abdullah, working as a volunteer with Youth in Action Association, Afghanistan. being a volunteer in my country I feel very happy and proud, as our association is working on more than five phases: Peace, environment, poverty reduction, Anti drugs campaign, health and education, in these phases or actions volunteerism is very essential to have a sustainable development. For peace we have different tools to carry such campaigns, like cricket tournaments (sports against drugs). We have blood campaigns, going through every university, colleges and schools to donate blood for those who really need. Also we have environment campaigns. As a volunteer I want to say that volunteerism is the only good and essential practice for a sustainable development.*

<sup>167</sup> Samuel Hall/NRC/IDMC/JIPS (2012), *Challenges of IDP protection in Afghanistan – Research study on the protection of internally displaced persons in Afghanistan*.



## 4.5 Recommendations for the National Youth Strategy

The research team recommends the following 15 youth-sensitive programmes, an implementation mechanism and obligations to be followed when developing the National Youth Strategy. This section will finish then on the need for further research on youth in Afghanistan at a time of transition.

**Table 12.**  
**Summary of Recommendations for the National Youth Strategy:**  
**15 Youth-Sensitive Programmes for Afghanistan**

No.	Programme Area	Programme Name
1	EDUCATION	Youth Management Information System (YMIS)
2		National School Re-Integration Programme
3		Harmonizing Higher Education Programme
4		Access to Education through New Technologies Programme
5		National Study Abroad Scholarship Competition
6	TRAINING & EMPLOYMENT	Employment Service Centres for Youth (ESCY)
7		Youth Internship Placement Programme
8		Volunteering for Afghanistan Programme
9		Foster Private Entrepreneurship for Youth
10	HEALTH	Youth Mentoring and Psychosocial Support Programme
11		Awareness & Access to Health Care Facilities for Marginalized Youth
12	CIVIC ENGAGEMENT & CULTURE	Enabling Environments for Civic Engagement Programme
13		National & Provincial Youth Cultural Panels
14	FUNDING	National Youth Development Fund
15		On-budget mechanism for earmarked youth interventions

## EDUCATION

*If you read the history, every change has come from the universities. Whether it was Najibullah, Ahmad Shah Massoud, they all started from the universities. If you want to change this you have to start from the universities. The professors, the youth. I don't mean a bloody coup d'état, but a new generation, a new generation that has not been through war. They have talent and they have the energy.*

*Ehsan, Kabul*

Two key findings of this study on education and the Afghan youth are i) the prevalence of school dropouts in the primary school level, and ii) the promise of bilingual and multi-lingual skills to diminish regional differences and enhance national integration.

1. ***Preventing dropouts from the formal educational system.*** The key findings of this study on education and the Afghan youth show that the number of young people in education is higher than ever before, with a rising proportion of female students. The data shows that young people are keen on pursuing their education through university level degrees, and are unlikely to drop out once they reach this level. The tipping point occurs at the primary school level, where dropout rates are the highest. Past that level, dropouts decrease with the level of education – a trend that can be encouraged through targeted policy making. Given that late entry and class repetitions lead to many being in school at lower grades than their age would indicate, there is an opportunity to re-integrate dropouts within the formal school system.
2. ***Capitalizing on bilingual and multi-lingual skills to enhance national integration.*** The study finds that a useful indicator for the role of education in national integration are patterns of bilingualism (people who are fluent in both Dari and Pashto). This has important implications for questions of local and regional identity and for the role that youths may play in shaping Afghan national identity over the next generation. Bilingualism is lowest in Badakhshan (where geographic isolation plays a role), and highest in Nangarhar, which is located in the Pashtun East and near to the national administrative centre of Kabul. Kunduz also has a high level of bilingualism, which is likely a reflection of the varied ethnic groups therein. Identifying one regional hub to pilot test stronger bilingual and multi-lingual initiatives – Nangarhar in the East, Badakhshan in the Northeast, Kunduz in the North etc. – through a proper baseline, mid-line and end-line of educational activities, can provide a dual benefit for the state: 1) diminishing tensions around political, social and ethnic lines, and 2) increasing the marketability of the youth on the labour market, both of which will contribute in the long-run to national integration.

Specific initiatives to address these should include – with programmatic ideas underlined:

✓ **A “National School Re-Integration Programme”**

○ **Mapping out-of-school children in Afghanistan**

A 2011 UNICEF study on “out-of-school marginalized communities”<sup>168</sup>, recommended a national strategy for targeting out-of-school children from communities that require a coordinated intervention. The pre-requisite is a proper mapping of the groups that fall under the out-of-school trend highlighted in this study, in rural and urban contexts. This mapping will be a first step towards assessing profiles and needs.

○ **Mapping of schools “at risk”**

As recommended in a CARE report<sup>169</sup>, attack rates on different school structures must be mapped and analysed. Specific provinces and regions are increasingly subject to attacks on schools. Mapping which these are can lead to proper solution finding for children living in areas where security prevents enrolment and attendance of children in school.

○ **Targeting marginalized communities – Mobile Schools**

As the previous study showed, marginalized communities – whether ethnic minorities, stateless persons or IDPs – are often more vulnerable to being left out of the formal educational system. They should be given a particular focus in the National School Re-Integration Programme – whether Jogis/Jat, Kuchis, or IDP children living in informal settlements. One way of addressing these populations need could be through a mobile school initiative as highlighted by other stakeholders such as CARE in Afghanistan.

○ **Awareness building among families with children dropouts**

Attention should be paid to the fact that youth are encouraged to go to school, or to dropout, by their families. A National School Re-Integration Programme aimed at identifying and targeting school drop outs (with an emphasis on primary school), and re-integrating them within the formal school system, will have to start at the family-level. Information sharing on such opportunities will enable families to consider the option of children being returned to school, with an emphasis on the necessity to commit to 1 shift per day.

○ **Improving the infrastructure to increase access to education**

Attention should be paid to the type of school and college buildings. The research finds that schools in rural areas sometimes lack a proper structure or protective wall – discouraging girls’ attendance – or proper division between girls and boys.

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<sup>168</sup> Samuel Hall (2011), *Jogi and Chori Frosh communities – A story of marginalization*, UNICEF Afghanistan

<sup>169</sup> CARE (2009), *Knowledge on Fire : Attacks on Education in Afghanistan – Risks and Measures for Successful Mitigation*, September 2009

✓ **“Harmonizing Higher Education Programme”**

The current feedback on higher education in Afghanistan can be summed up as a split between private universities – with lower skilled students but more modern curricula and methods – and public universities – skilled students but an out-dated curricula and teaching methods. The following can help bridge this gap to harmonize higher education offers in Afghanistan:

○ **Public and private universities**

If public universities are unable to absorb the supply of students every year, private universities can be supported through government scholarships to fill the lack of seats. The aim of policy makers must be to ensure as many youth as possible are able to access higher education while keeping a check on the curriculum and quality of education of private universities. A list of government-approved private universities should be released at the end of each school-year, with curricula and diplomas recognized by the Government of Afghanistan.

○ **Defining labels in line with international and national standards**

The diversity of labels, diplomas and certificates offered in Afghanistan so far prevents a coherent and nationally homogeneous plan. For the higher end institutes, labels should be aligned with international standards; while for a second-tier of schools, labels should be based on a national standard.

✓ **“Access to Education through New Technologies”**

○ **Creative initiatives in Afghanistan are being piloted to aim at increasing the literacy of individuals and households.** Mobile learning tools in and outside of the classroom have been developed. For example, the “Great Idea” distance mobile learning project in Afghanistan uses modern mobile technology to supplement math and science education through video lessons and a helpline for secondary school students and teachers. Roshan, leader in the telecom sector in Afghanistan, “is developing products and services that link education, healthcare, business and technology to support Afghan youth as they develop into the leaders of the future”<sup>170</sup>.

○ Using new technologies for education has so far been used to support the formal school system – however it can also be a service provided to those who live in highly insecure areas and are unable to go to school. These methods can also be used to reach girls and boys who are not allowed to step outside their homes – through basic literacy training or more advanced courses in mathematics. Current text-based mobile services should be reviewed in partnership with DMOYA and the Ministry of Education to ensure that private sector initiatives are in line with the needs of youth.

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<sup>170</sup> Forbes, *Interview with Karim Khoja*, <http://www.forbes.com/sites/skollworldforum/2013/05/02/mobile-afghanistan-how-a-national-telecom-network-delivers-social-goods/>

✓ **A “National Study Abroad Scholarship Competition”**

- Studying abroad was highlighted as an aspiration for many youth interviewed. The survey did not reveal a number of people who had gone abroad for the specific objective of getting an education. This comprised of **3 respondents out of 2658 interviews who studied abroad**. This finding may point to a lack of educational investment outside of Afghanistan by the international community – providing education in Afghanistan but not opening sufficiently large or accessible venues to seek education abroad. 174 respondents had studied in neighbouring countries like Pakistan and Iran as refugees. Majority of those who had studied abroad were males living in urban areas.
- Currently, educational exchanges with India have been increasing – through an initiative led by the Government of India to support the education of Afghan youth through higher education opportunities. The Government of Afghanistan should prioritize “educational migration schemes” with foreign governments through tripartite agreements set between the Government of Afghanistan, a foreign government and the United Nations. Opportunities will undoubtedly be limited however, annually, the government can launch a “National Study Abroad Scholarship Competition” to ensure that – based on merit and achievement – youth are selected to go abroad and study, and come back to the country to use their newly developed skills for the benefit of the country. At the moment, such schemes are foreign government-led and hence not homogenised; they should now become part of a larger framework that is led by the Government of Afghanistan under technical support from the UN. Instilling a sense of competition among the youth will ensure that obligations are well understood and that selection processes are transparent, for greater accountability of scholarship selection criteria and outcomes.

## **TRAINING & EMPLOYMENT**

As noted in this report and in Samuel Hall/ILO’s *Time for Sustainable Jobs* report in 2012, “with between 500,000 and 750,000 children completing secondary school each year<sup>171</sup>, Afghanistan has an increasing need to generate employment opportunities for its new labour force. Young employees are generally bound to occupy temporary and precarious positions of “apprentices” or “trainees” in a labour market with no contractual or regulatory obligation for employers”<sup>172</sup>.

This report showed that:

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<sup>171</sup> MoLSAMD, *Facilitation of Sustainable Decent Work through Skills Development and Market-Friendly Labor Regulations*, Revised First Draft, March 2011

<sup>172</sup> Samuel Hall (2012), *Time to move to Sustainable Jobs: Study on the State of Employment in Afghanistan*, for the International Labor Organization (ILO), June 2012, p. 6

1. **The level of employment of youths remains low** and the jobs available are usually vulnerable positions – with instability of contracts, instability of income and vulnerability to the seasonality of their jobs.
2. **A youth dependent on their familial networks for work**, which limits their ability to break out of poverty cycles or limits their ability for social and economic evolution. As a result, youths are given short-term options that limit their economic power.

As such, one is the problem of lack of jobs, the second of lack of quality, stable, and sustainable jobs for youth.

✓ **“Employment Service Centres for Youth” – ESCs with a built-in Youth Department**

The Employment Service Centres set up by ILO in Afghanistan and now run by MoLSAMD have proven successful on a number of occasions – in the past but are no longer operational due to a lack of resources and lack of strategy. The programme should be re-energized and reinforced with a new component added with a Youth Department dedicated to finding jobs for youth. MoLSAMD currently has 8 Employment Service Centres (ESCs) – however, none of them is operational in practice due to a lack of full-time staff and sufficient resources. ESCs are meant to provide job seekers with advice on vocational training and self-employment opportunities, co-operating with employers to identify the skills demanded by the labour market, and as such are an important – but at this stage ineffective and under-resourced – component of a national labour market information system. The opportunity to introduce a Youth Department in each ESC can be the right time to refocus attention on this institution, to build up this existing infrastructure and allow it to deliver the services it is mandated to provide. The benefit for youth can be through activities as follows:

- **Make information on job vacancies easily available**  
Information on opportunities of employment and process of recruitment should be easily available. The survey said that majority of the youth hear about employment vacancies through their families and friends. In this case, media should be used to disperse information as widely as possible.
- **Workshops on Resume / CV creation**  
Youth either do not have knowledge about how to present themselves, in person or in writing, or have weak CVs. Emphasis should be put on not only drafting of CVs, but the actual *content* of CVs. Often times, youth include irrelevant information or do not realize the gaps that should be filled in their CVs – making them unattractive hires for companies.
- **Women participation to the labour market**  
There is a strong gender differentiation in employment status in Afghanistan due to limited mobility outside the home. However, women are needed in many sectors – from education, to health, service provision in the humanitarian and development sectors, social work, and so forth. Female staff in these sectors allow for a greater access to reaching populations such as girls and women who should have the right

to an equal access to social services. As such, women participation to the labour market needs to be built into the Employment Service Centres for Youth, with job offers set aside for women only, and a department run by women for women at the provincial level – to put women and their families’ at ease in the process of employment search. This study finds that female youth are more likely to obtain contract positions in the public sector in Afghanistan, but that their presence needs to be reinforced in other sectors, and at higher positions.

✓ **“Youth Internship Placement Programme”**

As reported in Samuel Hall/ILO’s *Time for Sustainable Jobs* report in 2012<sup>173</sup>, “if short-term programmes that target and quickly improve employment outcomes, especially for youth and other vulnerable groups, are necessary, they should not be the cornerstone of donors’ strategies: a temporary placement in an emergency or quick-impact programme does not equal a job”.

- To build capacity so that youth can – in the long run – acquire marketable skills and learn on-the-job, a Youth Internship Placement Programme can help strengthen actual professional skills for a more sustainable impact, investing today to reap the benefits in the future. This type of initiative can be pilot tested for youth who are not yet married and who do not yet have the income earning responsibility for an entire household. There is a small window of opportunity – especially in urban areas – to target Afghan youth for internship positions.

✓ **“Volunteering for Afghanistan Programme”**

- **Emphasis on voluntary work**  
The youth should be encouraged to use their spare time in doing constructive voluntary work in their community or area. This will foster a sense of ownership and participation in the youth. It will also build capacity in various skills, depending on the nature of involvement. Voluntary work can also serve as a medium of dialogue in bringing together youth from various provinces, profiles towards a meaningful cause and foster a sense of achievement and usefulness in them.
- **Incentives for volunteerism**  
In a country where youth are at a young age required to add to the family’s income, volunteering or internships may seem out of scope. Incentives will need to be provided. For example, awareness should be raised about the impact of volunteering on raising the profiles of youth – and their voices – at the community level, while allowing them to build stronger curriculum vitae that will better position them for scholarship opportunities, internship opportunities or job placement programmes.

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<sup>173</sup> Samuel Hall (2012), *Time to move to Sustainable Jobs: Study on the State of Employment in Afghanistan*, p. 50

✓ **“Foster Private Entrepreneurship for Youth”**

Business training workshops and micro-financing can provide youth with the practical knowledge and capital to set up their own businesses. The success of the Afghanistan Rural Enterprise Programme provides a blueprint for how further such work could be implemented.

○ **Beyond vocational training: Encouraging creativity**

Rather than stopping at just providing vocational training, policy makers must take it a step forward and equip youth with the ability to creatively use their skills with the resources available to them. They should encourage self-initiative and urge the youth to optimally utilize what is available to them even in difficult circumstances.

○ **Support the creation of a Youth Business Forum**

For Afghanistan’s young entrepreneurs, a youth business forum should be created which creates links between entrepreneurs from different provinces as well as with markets.

## HEALTH

The survey finds two under-addressed health issues among young people in Afghanistan – that touch on both physical and mental health:

1. **Young women have inadequate information about reproductive health issues** and subsequent healthcare services, which is compounded by the challenge of physically reaching healthcare facilities.
2. **The perceived high demand for mental health treatment** is a particularly noteworthy finding from the survey, as mental health coverage is poor across many parts of the country, and a shortage of trained medical professionals makes diagnosis very difficult. The overall demand for psychological support is high with more than half of the respondents thinking that they need it in each of the 7 provinces surveyed.

✓ **“Youth Mentoring and Psychosocial Support Programme”**

As mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, youth in Afghanistan are going through a dual transition, after decades of war and living in exile. The number of challenges – identity, current and future responsibilities – that they have to cope with are varied and complex. Psychosocial programmes in Afghanistan target women and children, through programmes targeted at Child Protection, but there is no comprehensive youth programme. However, the youth present an approachable category for mentorship schemes that can provide them both specialized psychosocial support and life mentoring.



- **Filling in a Gap: From Child Protection to Youth Protection**

Particular vulnerable categories of youth – minorities and marginalized communities – are left out of psychosocial programmes that have a difficult time transiting from Child Protection to Youth Protection. 75% of the youth interviewed mentioned having a need for psychosocial support, yet only 12% have received help. This will require i) mapping the availability of specialized psychosocial service NGOs and actors in Afghanistan, and ii) creating a consortium of psychosocial health care NGOs that can, with the support of the Government and of donors, address the issue of Youth's Health Protection at a national scale.

- ✓ **“Awareness and Access to Health Care Facilities for Marginalized Youth”**

Evidence from past studies show that “psychological support is particularly required for conflict-induced IDPs who have often directly witnessed or otherwise experienced violence in addition to the potential trauma of displacement.<sup>174</sup>” Although IDPs report seeking medical treatment in cases of physical health problems, anecdotal evidence shows that they are not treated equally in hospitals and often prefer relying on private doctors. This is to be extended to marginalized communities – a study in bonded labour situations also showed scepticism towards the treatment to be received in government hospitals.

- **Sensitization programs for health staff – The access to marginalized youth**

Access to healthcare in Afghanistan is undoubtedly a question of proximity and actual physical access to health service providers. It is other times, and specifically for marginalized communities, an issue of how they are received, or how they perceive they are treated. The treatment by health care service providers should be sensitized to the profiles and needs of particular vulnerable categories – in this case marginalized youth categories who are sensitive about potential judgements of their cases by adults. They require additional support and understanding.

- **Invest in training and capacity building**

There is a serious lack of specialist doctors like gynaecologists and obstetricians. Many tend to cluster in large urban areas and rural communities are often underserved. Incentivizing health workers to work in rural districts through salary, childcare facilities or other benefits should be considered.

- **Women as agents of change in reproductive health awareness**

Keeping in mind accessibility to women, especially in rural areas, young women can be encouraged to spread awareness about the benefits of medicine and proper medical care during pregnancy and childbirth. They along with their husbands can be informed of the merits of family planning. Even if social norms dictate that they may not be allowed to make these decisions for themselves, they may bring change when they are the decision makers of their houses – as mothers, in-laws or grandmothers.

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<sup>174</sup> Samuel Hall/NRC/IDMC/JIPS (2012), *Challenges of IDP Protection in Afghanistan – Research study on the protection of internally displaced persons in Afghanistan*, November 2012, p. 40

## CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

The key findings of this study related to civic engagement are two-fold and paint an overall picture of a youth that wants to be engaged in its society, at a local level, whilst doors are still to a large extent closed to them:

1. **Youth's under-valued voice in Afghan society** - the majority of youths interviewed felt that their opinions were *not* valued in society. A key issue being the perceived generational gap. A number of youth, irrespective of whether their opinions were valued or not, felt that the decision-making society of Afghanistan was largely an elderly society, with little space to accommodate the youth, today or tomorrow.
2. **A greater willingness to have a voice in a collective society, at the local level** - Based on the survey and substantiated by the qualitative research, it seems that Afghan youth feel that even if they can influence government, it will be first and foremost at the local level representation of the government and not at a national scale. Afghan youth do not feel like their voices can be heard at the national level.

Youth need the support and an enabling environment to allow them to play this greater role in their society. Unlike youth interviewed in cities abroad, the youth in Afghanistan want more engagement on the social and political level. The interest in politics is clear for the majority of Afghan youth – whether they are very interested in politics (42%) or somewhat interested in politics (22.8%), politics is part of the Afghan youth's reality. The top four provinces with the highest interests in politics were Kabul, Herat, Kunduz and Balkh. This interest is at the moment not reflected in the degree and nature of participation in political activities. This could be indicative of not enough platforms that allow youth to participate in political activities or a lack of initiative and desire in the youth themselves to translate their interest into participation.

### ✓ “Enabling Environments for Civic Engagement Programme”

Engaging youth in governance, development and social-political processes at local, district, municipal, provincial and national level, and ensuring the participation of young women and men in advocacy.

- **Community service:** The entry point for youth can be **targeted social works activities** – cleaning and rehabilitation of community infrastructures, tree planting – that will improve the lives of communities, who will then see a benefit of youth participation
- **Internship programme with local government:** To allow youth to acquire skills and follow the activities of local government representatives. At the municipality level, youth can be integrated in administration and several other departments. At the rural level, youth can provide assistance to daily office management and policy making fora. They should be tasked to report in writing the activities of their local

government, as a way to provide the leaders an incentive to be pro-active and to deliver services to communities. Similar initiatives – like the Afghanistan Municipal Strengthening Program (AMSP) – have in the past attempted such schemes.

- **Debating teams to foster discussions and dialogue:** In the region, such as in neighbouring Pakistan, debating skills are taught early on to youth in schools. In Afghanistan, such a debating culture is lacking. However, this can be instated outside of the formal school system through talks about peace-building and conflict resolution. If peace building as a concept is being introduced to the youth, it has to be linked with what it means for them in their daily lives. National debating competitions could be organized with the aim of having teams representing their communities.
- **Dialogues with elders to bridge the generational gap:** This can be done by holding youth forums and seminars in the provinces that discuss at the role of youth in the future – in concrete terms and outputs for their communities. This will help both youth and elders realize the capacity and potential contributions of the youth.

✓ **“Recreation and Sports by Youth for the Youth”**

The importance of sports and recreational activities for the health and physical well-being of the young people is acknowledged in theory as in practice. These activities are also a key element of human resource development. They make a positive impact on youth; improve productivity; foster social harmony; and promote self- discipline and team spirit and enhancing national image.

- **Recreation and Sports for Peaceful Social Interactions:** In Afghanistan, sports are a career option for a very small minority. However, sportsmen and sportswomen are revered. Sports can help bridge the gap between social classes and ethnic groups in a divided country. Music, drama, arts and crafts are under-developed – yet present – initiatives for the youth in Afghanistan.
- **Training can be done by the youth for the youth:** Mapping of existing national sports teams and other sports-focused NGOs will lead to identifying sports youth leaders in provinces, giving them the chance to suggest improvements in recreation and sports for their provinces. They would report their ideas, suggestions and budget needs – to be funded through the National Youth Fund.

## CULTURE

Culture can be different things as it covers a range of human behaviour patterns – it includes the language(s) of nation, the art, the history, the ways that people have to communicate their knowledge, beliefs, values and attitudes. In this study of Afghan youth, the research team found that culture for the youth is language, communications, nationalism and history.

There are different **layers of culture** – national, regional, gender, generational, social cultures. In Afghanistan, often times, the regional culture is predominantly put forward – associated with ethnic, linguistic or religious differences that exist in the country. The youth can play a role to bring forward a stronger sense of a national culture.

This study finds that Afghan youth currently lack a common denominator that can bring youth from various provinces together on a common ground. Beyond talks of nationalism, the need is for grounded activities to have any meaningful impact in empowering the youth.

### ✓ **Facilitating Exchange programmes – “National & Provincial Youth Cultural Panels”**

Tensions between ethnic, religious and language groups are not new in Afghanistan. They are a basis of tensions and conflicts among communities. These can be further accentuated if communities perceive that they are being discriminated against. The feeling of discrimination and attacks felt at times by the Hazara community, at other times by the Kuchi community, have led to clashes over resources (such as land) in rural and urban areas. The youth can play a role in diminishing these initiatives.

- **Youth Cultural Exchanges between provinces:** Many exchange programmes have focused on having the youth of Afghanistan exchange with youth abroad. This research recommends in priority focusing on the national level – and having youth from different provinces meet each other to understand more about each other’s local and regional cultures and practices.
- **Youth Cultural Exchanges within provinces:** Provinces like Kunduz, as shown in this study, note a high level of bilingualism (Dari / Pashto) among youth, a reflection of the varied ethnic groups therein. At a time of growing insecurity in Kunduz, youths’ efforts to appease tensions can foster a greater sense of cohesion and calm. Representatives from different ethnic groups should be elected to a provincial youth panel that would meet on a monthly basis to showcase the diversity of their province’s culture, language and practices, and define strategic ways to advocate for greater social cohesion.
- The task of these panels will be to identify ways to promote peace-building through cultural activities.

### ✓ **Inclusion of the Arts and Culture in the syllabus**

Classes taught on art and culture (both Afghan and global), should be added in the curriculum with a very high weightage.

## 4.6 Implementation Mechanism

- ✓ All Ministries/Departments of the Government of Afghanistan, particularly in the development sector, will strive to make identifiable allocations in their budgets for youth development programmes;
- ✓ One Ministry should be chosen as a partner to the Department of Youth Affairs, to support DMOYA with implementation capacity beyond its current coordination capacity. Given the importance of education for youth, and the significant achievements of education in Afghanistan in the past ten years, including its strong funding base and development potential, it is advised that this ministry be the Ministry of Education. This partnership will form the basis for a focal point for all such programmes and schemes and will oversee the implementation of the provisions of this Policy;
- ✓ A **National Committee on Youth Policy and Programmes** should be established to review and assess various programmes and schemes focusing on youth. It will serve as an independent monitoring and evaluation watchdog for the Government of Afghanistan, reporting directly to the executive office. It will also provide recommendations on measures for implementation of the Plan of Action of the National Youth Policy;
  - This National Committee would have a sub-national body – the Sub-national Committee on youth Policy and Programmes – in each of the 34 provinces of Afghanistan.
  - The National and Sub-National Committees will be composed of: 70% youth elected representatives between the ages of 15 – 25, and 30% teachers, community leaders and civil society leaders, to promote integration of youth within the broader society – in partnership with their elders and peers. These committees will have to be gender, urban/rural, and ethnically balanced to promote national integration.
- ✓ A **National Youth Development Fund** will be created through contributions from international donors but not limited to – these should include Non-Governmental Organisations, private and public sector contributors.
  - This Fund should be managed in a first place by a consortium of UN agencies, namely UNFPA/UNICEF/UNDP
  - At a later stage, the fund should be handed over the National Committee on Youth Policy and Programmes, but should stay independent from the Government of Afghanistan for increased autonomy and neutrality. This fund will be dedicated to youth development activities with a focus on education, employment, health and civil society. Income Tax exemption would be sought for contribution to the Fund.

## 4.7 Obligations

Implementation mechanisms need to be accompanied by obligations for each stakeholder to increase accountability and delivery.

### Donors

- ✓ **Contributing to the National Youth Fund** to be managed by UNFPA/UNICEF/UNDP for a 5-year period between 2014 – 2019
- ✓ **Contributing to an on-budget funding mechanism for earmarked youth interventions to be implemented by the Government of Afghanistan**, through its key Ministries – Ministry of Education, of Labour and Social Affairs, of Rural Rehabilitation and Development.
- ✓ **Coordination between donors** to avoid duplication of projects in the same areas. As insecurity is declining, the number of provinces where international organizations are able to work is shrinking. Organizations therefore need to come together and think creatively on how they can improve their reach and the comprehensiveness of their programmes and access insecure areas to cover the needs of urban and rural youth.
- ✓ **Coordination with the government** to ensure a) the capacity development of the government and b) the sustainability of youth-led projects implemented by GoA.
- ✓ **Support NGO coordination mechanisms** – ACBAR and national NGO coordination bodies – for a 3-level (UN, GoA, NGO) participation in youth-based initiatives.

### Role of the government

- ✓ **Capacity building within the Deputy Ministry of Youth Affairs**  
The capacity of the deputy ministry of youth affairs in engaging with the youth and implementing sustainable projects should be built. Equal attention should be paid to their provincial sub-directorates as well. Presently, the role of the sub-directorate seems ill-defined with no clear targets, action points and deliverables. To a certain extent, this can be achieved by formulating the national policy with input from the provincial offices.
- ✓ **Coordination between government ministries and line departments in the provinces**  
Since the youth is a crosscutting category, they are oftentimes-indirect beneficiaries of other programmes. DMOYA should facilitate a coordination mechanism between various other line ministries on a monthly or quarterly basis – to share ongoing projects and resources towards empowering the youth.

✓ **Increase local presence and visibility**

DMoYA should work towards increasing its local presence and visibility amongst the youth in the urban and rural areas of the province. This will enable the youth to approach the offices of the deputy ministry with their concerns, placing the ministry in a more informed position to take action. The offices of DMoYA can also serve as the youth's link to the larger political system in the country.

✓ **Enabling not Dependency**

Rather than develop dependency on aid and external help, development programmes and the national policy should foster self-initiative and entrepreneurship – in domestic and public spaces in order to enable them to find the solutions. The youth need to be equipped with knowledge and resources rather than giving them everything on a platter.

### *Physical Sector*

✓ **Continue to support infrastructure growth in the education sector**

The government should continue to build schools, training institutes and universities, especially for women in areas where one does not exist.

✓ **Continue to support infrastructure growth in health sector**

Similarly, building of new hospitals and clinics should be encouraged – a) to provide health facilities and b) to create employment for doctors and nurses. Community based programmes can ensure that locals can be trained to be nurses in their community health facilities.

✓ **Support the development of mental healthcare staff and facilities**

The small amount of information available from HMIS about mental health in Afghanistan shows that detection rates are much higher in areas where there are a greater number of trained mental health workers and facilities. Although, there are still no accurate figures about the proportion of the population suffering from mental health issues, the legacy of violence and conflict has likely taken its toll on the mental wellbeing of many Afghans.

### *Fostering political leadership*

✓ **Encouraging the development of youth groups**

Policy makers should encourage the development of youth groups. Whilst a basic structure of district and provincial youth groups exists, this can be strengthened by providing support to youth groups at the provincial level for organizing activities like discussions, volunteer community work drives and foster the participation of the youth right from the local levels. However, the government needs to be careful that these youth groups are not being used for political purposes.

- ✓ **Giving a voice to the youth at least at the lower levels of decision-making**  
Strengthening existing youth shuras and forming a clear link between them and the main shuras in the districts and provinces will allow for youth voice to be heard at the local level.

## Community representatives (families, elders, leaders)

- ✓ **Targeting Parents and Community Elders**  
In order for youth to be empowered, change must come from within their households and communities - where the Afghan youth spend most of their time, and where decisions are taken. Projects should engage with the parents and community elders of the youth so that they can become a source of approval and encouragement for the youth.
- ✓ **Community Services and Social Work**  
In line with the objectives of this study, to empower youth and foster their personal and professional development, at the community-level, parents and elders should favour investing youths' time in community services and social work, benefiting the entire community. By delegating such responsibilities to youth, they will provide them with a platform to take their lives into their own hands, affect change. This will require **including a youth representative on Community Development Councils (CDCs) and local shuras** (both male and female shuras) to ensure that their actions are complemented by their voices being heard.

## Private Sector

- ✓ Today, most Afghan youth are hired as apprentices and trainees, in vocational training courses or directly by employers. A **National Initiative for Private Sector Engagement with the Youth** will require a more systematic approach to private sector engagement and commitment to the professional development of youth.
  - Through closer coordination and active participation with Employment Service Centres, or other government-led initiatives,
  - Through the launch of internship programmes for Afghan youth at the largest companies in the country – from the telcom sector (Roshan, Etisalat, MTN), to the manufacturing sector, production and factories (Alokozay, Coca Cola or Pepsi), the Afghan youth can be formally integrated into the private sector through internship schemes,
  - Through “open days” to explain expectations and familiarize youth on the needs and functioning of the private sector.



## Youth

- ✓ **Building inter and intra provincial ties amongst youth through youth groups**  
This should be on subjects of peace building and conflict resolution and how youth can be active agents of change in their own country
- ✓ **Strengthening ties between youth groups**  
With over 100 associations registered, the youth organisational landscape is diverse yet does not reach the impact that it should – lack of coordination and strategy, lack of resources and vision may be at the heart of the issue. Strengthening ties between youth-led groups is the sole responsibility of the youth themselves.

### 4.8 Privileges of Youth

It is key for the Government of Afghanistan to set standards of ‘privileges of youth’ in its National Youth Strategy. These privileges will outline what the youth can be assured of – from their government. It is a tacit agreement that binds youth expectations with government service delivery. This can be easily communicated to all youth and be kept as guiding principles directing the actions of the Government of Afghanistan on behalf of the youth.

The National Youth Strategy should then include, as these privileges, which the Afghan youth will be provided with:

- ✓ **Appropriate education and training** tailored to their needs, whether urban or rural, men or women, literate or illiterate, advantaged or marginalized;
- ✓ **Gainful employment and adequate opportunities for professional development** through paid and unpaid initiatives, whether internships or volunteering activities targeted at the youth’s personal and professional growth;
- ✓ **A clean environment with basic health services of quality;**
- ✓ **Access to Sports, Physical Education, Adventure and Recreational opportunities.**
- ✓ **Protection from all manner of exploitation;**
- ✓ **Suitable participation in decision-making bodies** at various levels, starting from the community to the provincial and national levels, with appropriate for a for the youth to express its views and needs, and provide its feedback on the work of local and national authorities
- ✓ **Sufficient allocation of independent and public funds for youth development** notably through a National Youth Fund.

## 4.9 Further Research

On the basis of this first comprehensive Youth Participatory Assessment, the need for further research remains, specifically:

### **Sector Wise In-depth Studies**

This survey provides base-line data on a broad range of sectors like education, employment, health and security. However every sector needs to be researched to gain an in-depth understanding of how youth interact in each sector. This report therefore recommends sector-specific in-depth studies, with a key eye on the future and how 2014 will impact youth. A longitudinal study – before and after 2014 – can help capture the impact of transition on youth.

### **Best Practices in Youth Empowerment**

When collecting sector-specific in-depth information, attention should be paid to best practices employed in other projects within Afghanistan in the past and present. The research finds that there are existing youth organisations, the problem being the lack of joint activities and initiatives to raise their voices and visibility at a regional or national level.

**Urban Displaced Youth in Kabul (2014) – A Samuel Hall Research Study** with a Technical Working Group composed of UNHCR, IOM, ILO, UNFPA, UNHABITAT, and ACBAR:

There is a clear need for a more youth-sensitive approach to data collection as stakeholders recognize the role of youth in global protest movements and the frustrations of under- and unemployed youth, as well as youth's role in the transition process. This research offers reliable information on youth profiles, at a time when Afghanistan witnesses a negative migration rate, with more Afghans leaving the country than returning 'home', and more Afghans internally displaced.

This research is **the first comprehensive survey of Urban Displaced Youth (15-24 years) in Kabul** conducted with a representative sample of 2,000 youth in the Fall 2013 with the support of researchers from Maastricht University and the University of Oxford. This sample includes forced and voluntary migration with a sample of: returning refugees, returning migrants (both voluntary and forced), IDPs, rural-urban migrants and non-migrants. A review of their economic and skills profile, primarily, along with indicators on their education, health, perceptions and the decision to migrate will provide an assessment of Urban Displaced Youth – the angle will be purposely migration and economy/skills oriented, to provide opportunities for actionable recommendations on programmes targeted at livelihoods, training, and wellbeing.

To understand the impact of Transition and changing mobility trends, stakeholders will benefit from this survey in 2013 – with a report public in the first half of 2014 – which can then be replicated in 2015, as a baseline on Urban Displaced Youth in Kabul city that meets the needs of a range of stakeholders.



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## 6. ANNEX- RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

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### 6.1 PHASE I: Background and Kabul Fieldwork

#### I. Desk Review:

A desk-based review of all the existing secondary literature was conducted in order to narrow down the scope of work and identify potential informational gaps. The desk review took place with the following questions in mind:

1. What has been written about the youth?
2. What are the challenges/key areas for the youth of the country?
3. What are the gaps in information that currently exist?

This desk review fed into the tools preparation for Phase I and Phase II of the fieldwork.

#### II. Questionnaire

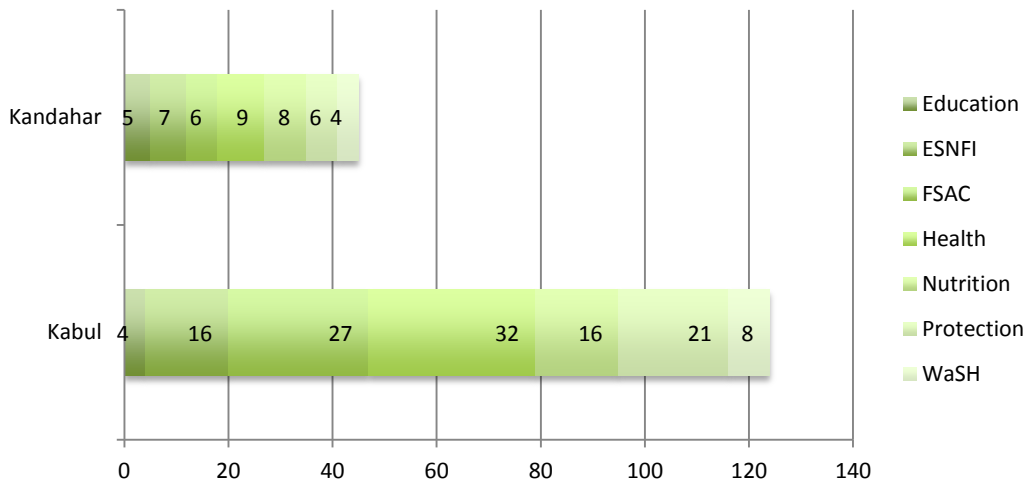
The questionnaire was drafted following preliminary consultations with UNDP at DMoYA. Guidelines provided in the original proposal were included in the questionnaire. The questionnaire included a total of 89 questions, then translated into Dari. All field interviewers were trained in before the start of the fieldwork. The questionnaire was then piloted by each interviewer in Kabul before being finalized for the survey launch.

#### III. Fieldwork: Kabul

For the fieldwork in Kabul, a 50-50 urban-rural sampling plan was used, for the following reasons – a) geographic proximity to the capital b) Focus of humanitarian assistance in Kabul as compared to other provinces. For example, according to data received from OCHA, following is the difference in assistance between Kabul city and Kandahar city for example –



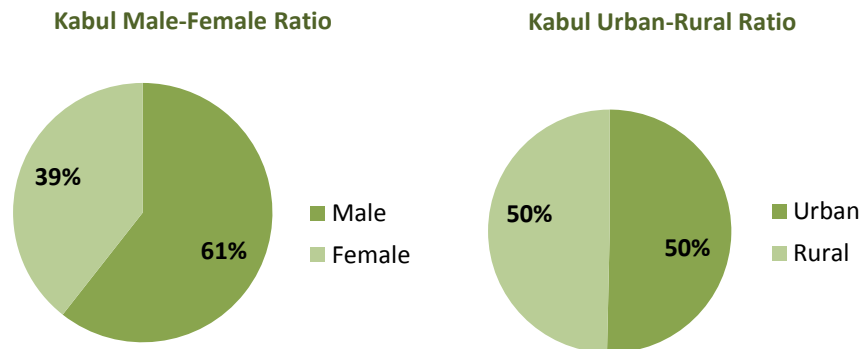
**Graph 34 - Disparity between actor representation in Kabul city and Kandahar city<sup>175</sup>**



Based on the sampling plan, originally submitted to DMOYA, 713 interviews were conducted in Kabul over a period of 4 days with a team of 30 interviewers. 2 days were dedicated to urban areas whilst the remaining two were in rural areas – districts away from Kabul city. Within the city itself, a north-south-east-west representative approach was followed in order to ensure that maximum representation was achieved in the survey. This was followed in the provincial surveys in Phase II.

Of the Kabul respondents:

**Graph 35 - Variable ratios of Kabul Province**



**IV. Focus Group Discussion and Case Studies**

Data from the quantitative survey was substantiated by focus group discussions held in both urban and rural areas and with men and women. In Kabul, during the first phase of fieldwork, 18 focus

<sup>175</sup> 3Ws, OCHA; This graph has also been reproduced in the yet unpublished, 'IDP Protection Study' commissioned by NRC in June 2012 and drafted by Samuel Hall Consulting

groups were conducted – with some targeting specialized groups such as private/public university students and youth in media.

## 6.2 PHASE II: Provincial Fieldwork

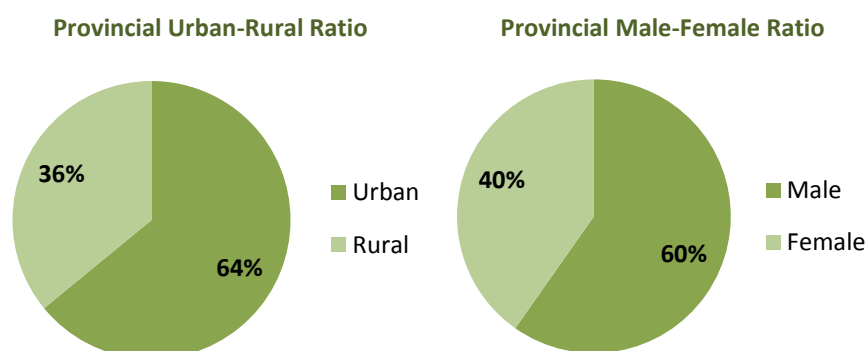
After Phase I, the provincial fieldwork was conducted in 14 other provinces with 1945 respondents based on a sampling plan set by the institutional counterparts, privileging a proportion rather than a representative sampling due to various restrictions. The budget did not allow for a nationwide representative survey, and hence only 7 provinces of the 15 provinces covered included a representative sample, the data from which is presented in this final report. A breakdown of the sampling is included in Table 12 Sampling plan below.

### I. Site Selection

The proportion of urban-rural was set at 60% urban and 40% rural in order to give enough weightage to the largely rural nature of the country but more importantly, to target those youth, who are the ‘drivers’ in urban areas. This was done keeping in mind constraints faced by the government and international organizations when planning and implementing interventions. Given reducing funding and accessibility, it was decided to give more weightage to urban youth – areas where it will be easier to implement programs.

Whilst urban sites were defined as the provincial capital and its suburbs, rural sites were defined as those districts that do not share a border with the provincial capital and do not fall on an important road linking two market centres. If due to insecurity, this classification were not possible, our field teams were asked to go as far away from the main road as possible to conduct the survey.

Graph 36 - Variable Ratios of Provincial Field work including 15 provinces



### II. Sampling Plan:

The fieldwork for this assessment was based on the sampling plan discussed below. In line with the initial technical proposal sent, this sampling plan was readjusted to take into account 4 factors: (1) a reduced budget available for the research and a reduced scope in the number of provinces targeted by this research; (2) deteriorating security conditions in a number of provinces, notably in the South

and East, blocking access to rural areas; (3) the quality and rigor of the statistical research methods that depend on readily accessible areas that can be monitored to ensure quality data collection; (4) the delay in the signing of the contract put time restraints on the research teams to do a thorough security assessment required for a fieldwork of this scope and nature.

The current sampling fits with international standards of quantitative research methods, with a statistical plan representative of the surveyed provinces:

1. **The sampling focuses on the largest and most important socio-economic centres** of the country and includes an additional number of representative provinces (both in terms of geographic spread and of demographics). An assessment of 34 provinces is not necessary to get a representative and comprehensive national picture.
2. **The number takes out insecure provinces** where rural sampling was not feasible according to the current security context, which is deteriorating. As such some areas that might have been accessible a few months ago were difficult to access for researchers in the fall. An example of this is Spin Boldak district in Kandahar, which was originally on the list of sites selected for the project. At the time of research however, it was found to be impossible for our field staff to access. The provinces hence, were chosen, keeping in mind the volatility of the security situation in them.

The sampling plan includes **15 provinces** and 2,658 respondents – given the priority over numbers of questionnaires rather than number of provinces from a statistical standpoint and rigorous quantitative research methods. In each targeted province, the sample size varied from 50 to 500 depending upon the population and size: as shown in the table below, provincial sampling sizes were based on the “degree of provinces” as defined by CSO and the MoI, which allows us to differentiate: 1) Kabul; 2) the main socio-demographic areas (*1<sup>st</sup> degree*); 3) secondary provinces and socio-demographic areas (*2<sup>nd</sup> degree*); 4) remote provinces with less population density (*3<sup>rd</sup> degree*).

**Table 12 - Sampling Plan**

Provinces	No of provinces	Degree of provinces	Number of interviews per province	Total Number of interviews
Kabul	1	-	720	720
Balkh, Badakhshan, Herat, Kunduz, Kandahar, Nangarhar	6	1 <sup>st</sup> degree	210	1260
Baghlan, Faryab, Ghazni, Paktya, Parwan,	5	2 <sup>nd</sup> degree	105	525
Bamyan, Nimroz, Panjshir,	3	3 <sup>rd</sup> degree	56	168
<b>Total</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>2658</b>

### III. Field Key Informant Interviews

Key informant interviews were conducted with the Departments of Education, Youth Affairs, Women’s Affairs, counter-narcotics and national and international organizations on their

perceptions and programming with regards to youth. These interviews provided an account of the situation in the provinces as far as interventions towards youth, away from Kabul is concerned.

#### **IV. Focus group discussions**

In order to substantiate the information gathered from the quantitative survey, more than 50 focus group discussions were conducted both in urban and rural areas in each province and with male and female youth. Field teams were trained in focus group guidelines that included the following themes:

- i. **Institutional Knowledge:** The purpose of this section is to find out what the youth think of civil administration institutions in the society and what is their level of awareness about their existence. It also includes their views of the ANP and ANSF.*
- ii. **Human Rights:** The purpose of this section is to discuss concepts of equality and human rights with the youth and find out what they think about the position of men and women in the society and the vulnerabilities that they might face.*
- iii. **Aspirations and Expectations:** The purpose of this section was to discuss what expectations youth have from the government and what their aspirations are. Its aim was also to find out if and how their aspirations had changed and what were the factors behind it.*

#### **V. Case Study Interviews**

International researchers were sent to the field to support the field teams in provinces where security permitted. These researchers identified and met with individuals between the ages of 15-25 years with unique profiles and vulnerabilities and carried out in-depth case studies. It was often found that youth preferred to talk in an informal one-to-one conversation rather than a focus group discussion.

## 6.3 PHASE III: Focused Surveys and Addressing the Gaps

### I. Desk Research

A review of all relevant documentation including policy papers and strategies of UNDP’s youth programs and DMoYA was conducted to understand top-down interventions and their impact. This desk review included the review and assessment of official reports, available documentary sources and the history and trend of indicators pertaining to the youth in the country.

1. Who is recognized as youth by policy and decision-makers in Afghanistan? Is there any section of population that is ‘invisible’ to policy-makers?
2. What are the main challenges that have been identified previously? How have these been addressed? What are the gaps still remaining?
3. What has been the trend of addressing and empowering the youth in the country?

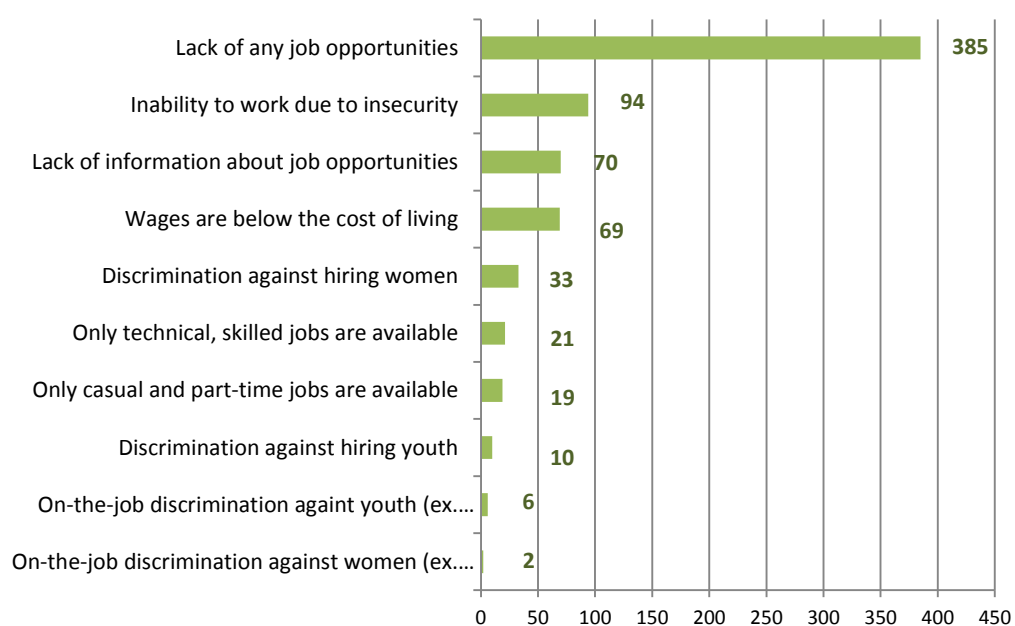
### II. Key Informant Interviews:

The list of key informants included provincial and national stakeholders as well as key national and international non-governmental actors. The interviews follow an in-depth interview methodology, with open-ended questions, lasting on average 30 minutes to 1 hour per respondent. Key guidelines were drafted for each informant – depending on the area of specialization.

### III. Focused Surveys: 3 Additional Surveys

Given the broad scope of this study, the provincial survey aimed to capture information about youth on as many generic themes as possible. During the course of this exercise and qualitative fieldwork, certain areas were identified as being key issues in all provinces – education and employment. For example, certain difficulties were identified with the *Concours* system of selection for university education. Similarly, for employment, the following challenges were identified –

Graph 37 - Challenges identified by youth with regards to youth and employment



In order to dig deeper into this, 3 additional focused surveys of 100 interviews were conducted in Kabul:

- 100-respondent survey on **education** in Kabul, with a 50/50 male-female ratio,
- 100-respondent survey on **employment** in Kabul, with a 50/50 male-female ratio,
- 100-respondent survey on **female health** where all respondents were only female.
  - Out of the female health respondents randomly selected in Kabul city, 58% were under 20 and 42% over 20.

For all of the three focused surveys, the age group of respondents followed the methodology of the main survey. Respondents were randomly sampled from all geographic areas of the city – North, South, East and West of the city – to capture a range of ethnic and socio-economic groups. 25 interviews per each of the four geographic regions of the city were administered through a random sampling of youth within the pre-defined age category.

The questionnaires for both education and employment were drafted based on discussions with youth and their responses in focus group discussions.

#### **IV. Focus Group Discussions**

During the third phase of fieldwork for this assessment, focus group discussions were conducted with specific population groups like the ANA and ANP. Additionally, a focus group was also conducted with the interviewers aged between 15-25 years, who went into the field to conduct the interviews for this survey.



## Samuel Hall. Contacts

[info@samuelhall.org](mailto:info@samuelhall.org)

[www.samuelhall.org](http://www.samuelhall.org)