

RAISING GIRLS' MINDS, RAISING A NATION

A Holistic Framework for Educating Girls in Taliban-Controlled Afghanistan

A Policy Paper

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Disclaimer: The views expressed here are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Afghanistan Policy Lab

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Key Points

Before describing the current situation of girls' education in Afghanistan and proposing potential solutions, it is essential to highlight some key points. First, the best way to educate girls or boys is through quality, in-person education at a proper school. Second, a poor form of education—ideological and with no competency and skill—is developing in Afghanistan for girls (at the elementary level) and boys (both at the elementary and secondary levels, as well as higher education) and turning Afghanistan into a hub for ideological and radicalized teachings. Third, an adaptable approach within a multi-faceted model must be implemented to ensure girls have access to education. Fourth, this paper proposes an unconventional educational framework designed to meet the needs of educating girls and to prevent them from further vulnerabilities. Lastly, this paper will not identify all possible and practical mechanisms for educating girls, such as clandestine and hidden formats, which could be used to further limit the space for girls' education in light of the current situation.

I. Why is There No Girl's Education?

Analyzing the Reasons behind the Taliban's Prohibition of Girls' Education in Afghanistan

Afghanistan presents a unique and concerning situation regarding the quality and accessibility of education, particularly for girls. Since the Taliban's takeover in August 2021, the country has seen a significant regression in its education. With systemic restrictions and ideological shifts, the takeover is impacting the educational landscape. Among the new changes, the most severe one is the ban on girls' education beyond grade six.

Currently, around five out of six million girls are unable to attend school and higher education in Afghanistan. From this number, 70% of 3.7 million children out of school were girls, and now 2.5 million are banned by the Taliban. The Taliban places little importance on modern and quality education, making Afghanistan the only country in the world where contemporary educational systems are formally subordinated to traditional religious teachings. This systemic restriction limits young females' academic growth and limits their potential to contribute to society. This injustice is deeply intertwined with the religious norms enforced by the Taliban.



Understanding the Taliban's rationale behind the ban on girls' education requires examining several key aspects of their educational policies:

1. Education Objectives of the Taliban:

Examining the ideological foundations that guide their educational policies and the impacts these policies have on the curriculum and accessibility of education for various demographics, particularly for girls and marginalized communities.

2. Madrasafication of General Education:

The increased integration of traditional religious schooling (madrasas) into the broader educational framework raises questions about the quality and inclusivity of education and its limitations.

Since the Taliban's August 2021 takeover, Afghanistan is the only country globally enforcing a complete ban on girls' secondary (grades 7-12) and higher education. This policy affects girls aged 12 and older. UNESCO estimates that this policy has excluded 1.4 million girls from secondary schooling. When including those already out of school pre-ban, due to poverty, conflict, or cultural barriers, the total rises to 2.5 million, making up to 80% of school-aged girls. As of June 2024, this ban had persisted for over 1,000 days, marking a severe regression from pre-2021 gains, when girls' enrollment had grown significantly post-2001.¹

Primary education is also declining, with UNESCO reporting a 1.1 million drop in enrollment (boys and girls) from 2019 to 2022.² Key factors include a shortage of teachers, exacerbated by bans on female teachers instructing boys; economic hardship reducing parental motivation; and infrastructure deficits such as the lack of schools in rural areas.

University enrollment has fallen by 53% since 2021, threatening Afghanistan's future supply of professionals, including doctors and engineers. Civil society organizations (CSOs) and feminist groups label this systemic exclusion "gender apartheid," noting its deliberate institutionalization by the Taliban. The educational collapse occurs against a backdrop of chronic instability. Decades

¹ IFP Media Wire, "UNESCO Says 1.4mn Afghan Girls Banned From Schools Since Taliban Return To Power," Media Wire, *Iran Front Page*, August 15, 2024, <https://ifpnews.com/unesco-1-4mn-afghan-girls-schools-taliban-power/>.

² IFP Media Wire, "UNESCO Says 1.4mn Afghan Girls Banned From Schools Since Taliban Return To Power."



of conflict, political instability, and long-term poverty (with over 90% of the people of Afghanistan in poverty per a 2023 UNDP report),³ combined with inadequate infrastructure (only 30% of schools have proper facilities) have compounded the crisis and erased two decades of educational progress.⁴

The Taliban strongly emphasizes religious education, advocating for both boys and girls to receive education in Islamic teachings. To support this goal, the Taliban's Islamic Emirate has established religious schools in various places across Afghanistan, from small towns to larger urban areas. This initiative aims to provide children with a foundation in Islamic teachings and foster adherence to the Taliban's ideology and values. Moreover, the Taliban administration, working with influential local figures and charitable organizations, is expanding efforts to establish religious schools for girls. This development, when assessed in light of the regime's view that religious education is fundamental to upholding and promoting the values of the Taliban's Islamic Emirate, is dangerous and worrying.

II. Why is the Taliban Interested in Religious Schooling?

The Taliban's emphasis on religious education stems from both ideological and strategic considerations. The movement's leaders come from a marginalized tribal background in Afghanistan and view modern education as incompatible with their interpretation of Islamic governance, leading them to prioritize religious instruction over contemporary academic curricula.

Two key factors drive the Taliban's strategy to establish and expand religious schools throughout Afghanistan. The first factor concerns the regime's need for survival. Over their 30-year history, the Taliban have recognized that significant segments of Afghanistan's society—including urban dwellers, youth, women, and intellectuals—reject their authoritarian religious system grounded in tyranny. Consequently, they have prioritized appeasing the war machine as well as the religious community that backs them to ensure these powerful contingents are committed to the Taliban maintaining its power. This strategy aims to curb rising discontent and prevent defections to rival factions like ISIS Khorasan and al-Qaeda. In the past two years, some Taliban fighters have

³ “Afghanistan Socio-Economic Review 2023–2024: UNDP Warns of Fragile Economic Recovery Falling Short of Meeting Basic Needs of People,” *Beporsed*, May 6, 2025, <https://www.beporsed.org/en-us/articles/27140798281117>.

⁴ UNHCR Operational Data Portal (ODP), “UNHCR Afghanistan Livelihoods Factsheet - October 2024.”



expressed dissatisfaction with the regime's failure to enforce Sharia, contributing to occasional criticism of the Taliban's Islamic Emirate by its fighters and sympathizers.⁵ Establishing and expanding religious schools demonstrates the Taliban's commitment to Islamic doctrine to doubting supporters.

The second factor contributing to the Taliban's strategy is its interest in achieving legitimacy through greater acceptance among various groups within the country. The Taliban recognize that by promoting religious schools, textbooks, and government support, the Taliban mentality will increasingly take root among the younger generation. This may be especially true as alternative educational methods, such as private schools, fail to address the actual educational needs of Afghanistan's youth. As more young people grow up with exposure to the Taliban's educational materials, the ideology of the Taliban could be more accepted by the majority of people in Afghanistan, further enhancing the Taliban's legitimacy in Afghanistan.⁶

The Taliban's Islamic Emirate is confronted with a paradox. It must maintain the Taliban, an extremist faction that has imposed authoritarian governance on the people of Afghanistan.⁷ Simultaneously, to achieve legitimacy and widespread acceptance, the Taliban needs to evolve beyond its extremist foundations.

III. Impacts of Education Restrictions

Analyzing the Multifaceted Consequences of the Taliban's Prohibition on Girls' Education in Afghanistan

The Taliban's ban on girls' education has generated severe immediate and long-term consequences across Afghanistan. These restrictions undermine national development and social cohesion, with implications extending far beyond the educational sector. While the prohibition affects multiple dimensions of life in Afghanistan, three areas demonstrate particularly profound and measurable impacts: psychological, social, and economic consequences.

⁵ Mirwais Balkhi, "Factors Driving Taliban Madrasafication in Afghanistan & Their Implications," Asia Dispatches, South Asia Institute (Wilson Center, 2025), <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/blog-post/factors-driving-taliban-madrasafication-afghanistan-their-implications>.

⁶ Balkhi, "Factors Driving Taliban Madrasafication in Afghanistan & Their Implications."

⁷ Balkhi, "Factors Driving Taliban Madrasafication in Afghanistan & Their Implications."



1. Psychological Impacts:

The educational prohibition has inflicted severe psychological harm on girls in Afghanistan, stripping them of their aspirations, dignity, and sense of self-worth. Deprived of schooling, many experience a crushing loss of identity and purpose, with documented increases in depression, anxiety, and suicidal ideation in the face of forced isolation and restricted futures. For girls in Afghanistan, education represents more than academic learning—it is a lifeline to empowerment, autonomy, and societal inclusion. The absence of educational opportunities leaves young women feeling erased from public life and silenced within their communities. While some seek refuge in underground classrooms or religious studies as acts of resistance, the psychological wounds still diminish society’s collective capacity for resilience and development. This systematic exclusion demands both urgent advocacy and the preservation of hope through storytelling, solidarity, and the relentless affirmation that every girl’s mind matters.

2. Social Impacts:

The education ban institutionalizes gender inequality at an unprecedented scale, with some describing it as "gender apartheid."⁸ It causes profound social harm, with Human Rights Watch documenting increased anxiety, depression, and hopelessness among girls, as their aspirations for careers or independence are crushed.⁹ The loss of critical developmental years creates lifelong limitations for personal growth and severely restricts family prospects across generations.

Excluded girls face heightened risks of early/forced marriage (up 15% since 2021, per UN Women), child trafficking, and exploitation.¹⁰ Girls who experience reduced access to school-based services like nutrition programs and menstrual hygiene support will face worse health outcomes. More significantly, the projected shortage of female healthcare workers will further restrict women’s access to maternal and general medical care. Afghanistan already maintains one of the world’s highest maternal mortality rates at 638 per 100,000 live births. Societally, the ban

⁸ “Gender Apartheid Must Be Recognised as a Crime against Humanity, UN Experts Say,” United Nations Office of the High Commissioner of Human Rights, February 20, 2024, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2024/02/gender-apartheid-must-be-recognised-crime-against-humanity-un-experts-say>.

⁹ “World News in Brief: ‘Gender Apartheid’ in Afghanistan, DR Congo Rights Abuses, Reforestation Crucial to Climate Fight,” UN News, June 10, 2024, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2024/06/1150881>.

¹⁰ “World Bank Open Data,” Maternal mortality ratio - Afghanistan (modeled estimate, per 100,000 live births), 2023, <https://data.worldbank.org>.



perpetuates poverty cycles, curbs social mobility, and undermines Afghanistan's recovery by excluding half the population from contributing to sustainable development.¹¹

3. Economic Impacts:

Excluding girls from education inflicts substantial and measurable economic damage on Afghanistan. UNICEF calculated that barring girls from secondary school costs Afghanistan 2.5% of its GDP annually, equivalent to at least US\$500 million in losses over the prior year. If the approximately three million girls currently affected could complete their education and join the workforce, they could contribute US\$5.4 billion to the economy over their lifetimes.¹² The long-term economic projections are even more severe. UNESCO estimates that the ban on women's higher education could generate US\$9.6 billion in losses by 2066, equivalent to two-thirds of Afghanistan's current GDP. This projection reflects the inability of the country to replace 600,000 banned female workers, including critical shortages of over 11,000 female teachers by 2030 and essential healthcare professionals. These figures exclude indirect costs, such as increased healthcare expenses resulting from adolescent pregnancies (up 20% since 2021, according to WHO estimates) and reduced sectoral productivity due to the loss of skilled professionals.¹³

Ultimately, evaluating the outcomes of Afghanistan's current educational conditions is crucial for understanding the broader implications on society. The impacts also extend beyond these three primary aspects. They encompass a myriad of issues, including gender inequality, political instability, ethnic tensions, cultural barriers, and limitations in business and entrepreneurship opportunities. These factors collectively deprive girls and women of their right to education and personal development.

In the long term, this educational deprivation creates a society lacking essential skills and competencies, which not only hinders Afghanistan's own progress but also poses a burden to the

¹¹ Admin, "Nearly Eight out of 10 Young Afghan Women Are Excluded from Education, Jobs, and Training," *UN Women Australia*, June 17, 2025, <https://unwomen.org.au/nearly-eight-out-of-10-young-afghan-women-are-excluded-from-education-jobs-and-training/>.

¹² "Depriving Girls of Secondary Education Translates to a Loss of at Least US\$500 Million for Afghan Economy in Last 12 Months," *UNICEF*, August 14, 2022, <https://www.unicef.org/press-releases/depriving-girls-secondary-education-translates-loss-least-us500-million-afghan>.

¹³ Arpan Tulsyan and Ishika Ranjan, "The Ripple Effects of Afghanistan's Ban on Girls' Education," *Observer Research Foundation*, August 14, 2025, <https://www.orfonline.org/expert-speak/the-ripple-effects-of-afghanistan-s-ban-on-girls-education>.



global community. The consequences are far-reaching, resulting in cycles of reproductive chaos and underdevelopment that can impede regional efforts for peace and stability. It is essential to address these multifaceted challenges to foster an environment where all individuals have the opportunity to contribute to a prosperous and equitable society. One impactful way to do this is through exploring alternative avenues to provide a quality education to girls in Afghanistan.

IV. Alternative Education for Girls:

Exploring Strategies and Methods to Educate Girls in Afghanistan through Maximum Service to the Maximum Number

In the present crisis, formal education for girls is banned or severely restricted, while low-quality, ideology-oriented education affects elementary girls' and boys' education at all levels in Afghanistan. As such, alternative education management for girls in Afghanistan has become a critical and urgent priority. Under current conditions, developing and managing an unconventional educational system requires realistic, community-based, and flexible strategies that must be feasible not only from a technical perspective but also from cultural, political, and security dimensions.

It is therefore necessary to establish a multi-dimensional mechanism for managing any alternative education system. This mechanism should be informal yet structured; monitorable; and supported and implemented by local institutions, civil society, female teachers, and international organizations.

Currently, the typology of girl students in Afghanistan is as follows:

Types of Girl Students	Estimated Number
Secondary & High School Students	3 million
Out-of-School Girls	2 million
Returnees	Variable (Recently from Pakistan, Tajikistan, Turkey & Iran)
Literacy Learners	6 million



V. Holistic Educating Approach to Afghanistan:

In Afghanistan under the Taliban, conventional educational approaches for girls are no longer viable. Given these unrepresented circumstances, an adaptive approach proves more practical and effective. With invaluable support from donors and collaborative efforts of intergovernmental organizations (IGOs) and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) active in education, this framework explores four diverse alternative learning modalities: self-learning, online learning, distance learning, and traditional small group learning. These modalities aim to enhance educational accessibility and effectiveness, tailored to meet the varied needs of learners in different contexts.

1. Self-Learning:

All sciences, mathematics, and language subjects within the general education curricula for both lower-secondary and upper-secondary grades can be self-directed by students in accordance with standardized guidelines from a managerial consortium that should be established for this purpose. See section VII for a proposal to this effect. A self-learning approach aims to foster independent critical thinking, enhance research skills, and promote a deeper understanding of the subject matter.

Students would utilize a variety of resources, including textbooks, online materials, and community engagement opportunities, to facilitate their learning process while adhering to the recommended frameworks and standards. Regular assessments and reflections would be integrated to ensure that students meet learning objectives and effectively apply their knowledge.

Groups	Subjects	Mechanisms	Resources Needed	Supervision
Lower-Secondary and Upper-Secondary	Science, Mathematics, and Languages	Material Packages Literate Parents Applications	Books, Applications, Soft version of materials	4.5-month Assessment
Teachers/Instructors	Capacity building for teachers	Learning packages	Internet, Soft version of materials	Examination through academic supervisors

Managers	Capacity building subjects	Learning packages	Internet, Soft version of materials	Examination by academic supervisors
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2. Online Learning

Digital education has become increasingly common worldwide. While the COVID-19 pandemic caused significant disruptions, it also accelerated new innovations and approaches. Afghanistan has experienced limited digital education through private and international institutions. Online learning could offer a viable alternative for continuing education for girls in urban areas where there is relatively better access to electricity, smart devices, and internet connectivity.

An online learning approach utilizes digital platforms that include educational content in the form of videos and interactive materials, alongside assessment systems. These resources can be made accessible to students either online or offline. The system can record and report data on student platform usage, duration of engagement with materials, and academic outcomes. For students accessing content offline, educational progress would need to be monitored and analyzed through alternative means such as surveys and reports.

3. Distance Learning

The core subjects in primary education, specifically science, mathematics, and English, along with upper-secondary and lower-secondary curriculum materials, would be delivered through an innovative distance learning program. This program would utilize a variety of instructional methods, including recorded classes led by experienced educators, comprehensive guidebooks, and supplementary online resources.

Students would have the flexibility to engage with the content at their own pace, allowing for a more personalized learning experience. The recorded instructions would cover essential concepts and skills, while the guidebooks would provide exercises, assessments, and additional reading to reinforce understanding and foster independent study. A distance learning approach aims to ensure that all students receive a robust education, regardless of their physical location, while promoting self-directed learning and critical thinking.



Groups	Subjects	Delivery Mechanisms	Academic Supervision
Lower- Secondary and Upper- Secondary Student	Science, Mathematics, and English	Mobile applications Internet Soft Version IVR/Phones	4.5 Month Examination
Lower Secondary and Higher Secondary students of Islamic Education	English	Internet Mobile Applications	4.5 Month Examination
Literacy Learners	Literacy Subjects	Guidebooks and Recorded Materials	Literacy Supervision

*Literacy core courses could also be delivered through the distance education plan.

4. Traditional Small Learning Groups:

In areas where it is difficult to reach; where electricity, mobile phones and other facilities are not available; and where parents are not able to support their children's education, small learning groups represent an exceptional solution. Groups, ideally of 5-8 children, should be taught by a teacher in their village, preferably by women teachers, while maintaining an appropriate cultural environment. Groups would likely be instructed in familiar languages such as Farsi, Dari, and Pashto. Social Sciences and Islamic Studies should be self-learned by students through the provided materials. Several practical mechanisms are proposed:

Maji-Mualims' Teaching Approach

- Girls' education through Maji Mullah (Religiously Literate Women) has proven effective in rural Afghanistan. This approach, historically focused on religious study with cultural orientation (not Sharia-oriented), can be adapted to broader education. Teaching in homes or small local centers, led by trusted female teachers, offers a culturally sensitive solution to educational challenges faced by girls.
- The Maji-Mualim model leverages community trust to create safe learning environments essential for girls' education. Home schools and local centers align with Afghanistan's cultural context, gaining family acceptance and overcoming barriers posed by security concerns and cultural restrictions. These settings reduce risks associated with traditional schools and provide controlled spaces for learning without fear.



- Additionally, homeschools offer flexible schedules that accommodate household responsibilities and can tailor curricula to the interests of students, making education more relevant. Female teachers serve as empowering role models, inspiring girls to pursue their education and careers while providing mentorship and support. By fostering community involvement in education, these initiatives promote sustainability and adaptability, ensuring that educational programs meet the evolving needs of local girls.
- **On-the-Job Training:** The private sector is one area that has been able to provide employment opportunities for women and has shown greater flexibility in Afghanistan. On-the-job training can be an effective alternative to traditional education, enabling women to acquire skills and secure employment, ultimately leading to increased income. It is better to pay more attention to this matter because job-related education does not have any limitations.
- **Hybrid Systems:** Integrating a blend of in-person and remote educational experiences tailored to the specific environment, facilitated by local management and bolstered by external technical support. This approach ensures a comprehensive learning experience that accommodates diverse needs while effectively leveraging technological resources.
- **Competency-Based Literacy:** Literacy programs can be thoughtfully redesigned to offer a foundational general education that encompasses essential subjects. This approach aims to equip high school girls with the educational competencies necessary for their secondary education. By integrating practical and relevant coursework, these programs can empower young women to thrive academically and foster a lifelong love for learning.

VI. Management Mechanism for These Systems:

- **Local Coordination Structure:** Establishing local educational committees composed of parents, community elders, female teachers, and community activists for decision-making and monitoring.
- **Training and Supporting Female Teachers:** Hiring and training local female teachers, emphasizing security, distance education, and ethical and educational qualifications.



- **Informal but Organized International Support:** Organizations such as UNICEF, UNESCO, and other NGOs providing educational resources, equipment, technical assistance, and discrete funding channels.
- **Simple Evaluation and Reporting System:** Rather than complex, formal systems, developing simple, practical tools for assessing student progress and teaching quality at the local level.

VII. Leading Platform:

Justifying the Creation of a Consortium of Education to Lead Alternative Education for Girls in Afghanistan

NGOs, IGOs, governments, education foundations, and UN agencies such as UNICEF should unite to create a Consortium of Education for Afghanistan—one that not only safeguards the right to learn for all students in Afghanistan but also builds pathways to empowerment and national development.

A Consortium of Education for Afghanistan (or the Consortium) would serve as a collaborative platform to coordinate the efforts of all interested entities. This approach enables a unified strategy for developing a coherent and well-resourced plan for education reform. By aligning the efforts of various stakeholders, the Consortium can ensure that resources are utilized efficiently and that initiatives are complementary rather than duplicative. This unified strategy would facilitate the creation of a comprehensive education policy that addresses the diverse needs of students, including those in remote and conflict-affected areas.

Pooling funds and expertise through a Consortium would maximize the impact and efficiency of educational initiatives. Individual organizations often face limitations in funding and technical expertise. However, by working together, they can leverage their collective resources to implement large-scale projects that would otherwise be unattainable. This approach might also facilitate additional funding from international donors who prefer supporting well-coordinated and impactful programs.

Engaging with Afghanistan diaspora communities and global policymakers is crucial for advancing inclusive education policies. A Consortium would possess a stronger voice and greater



influence in advocating for the rights of all children in Afghanistan to receive quality education. By presenting a united front, the Consortium can effectively lobby for policy changes, hopefully securing some commitments from the Taliban, and ensuring that education remains a priority on national and international agendas.

Expanding online and community-based learning is essential to reach children, especially girls, who face barriers to traditional schooling. The Consortium can spearhead initiatives integrating technology into education systems, providing access to digital learning resources and training teachers in innovative teaching methods.

Additionally, community-based learning programs can offer flexible and safe learning environments for children who cannot attend regular schools due to security concerns or cultural restrictions.

VIII. Consortium's Areas of Activity:

In addition to broader coordination and strategy-setting activities, the Consortium could also undertake a series of concrete and meaningful steps to educate girls in Afghanistan. The following efforts make up a roadmap for change and progress that will be critical to setting the stage for a new future: mapping educational opportunities, managing alternative education options, overseeing the implementation of these options, validating credentials, and establishing quality assurance systems.

Mapping Educational Opportunities for Girls & Women:

Mapping education in Afghanistan under current conditions requires a realistic, flexible, and data-driven approach. This process should encompass defining a set of key parameters that enable a comprehensive understanding of the state of education in the country, identifying methodologies and planned frequency to collect and report the information, and finally compiling and presenting the data in digestible formats for the Consortium and other trusted partners to use.

1. Access to Education:

- Number of active and inactive schools, disaggregated by gender and geographical location
- Availability of primary, secondary, and high schools
- Status of girls' schools and alternative religious schools

2. Student Population:

- Number of enrolled students, disaggregated by gender and grade



- Net and gross enrollment rates
 - Dropout rates, especially among girls
3. **Educational Workforce:**
 - Number of male and female teachers
 - Teachers' education level and specialization
 - Access to professional development for teachers
 4. **Infrastructure and Equipment:**
 - Type and quality of school buildings
 - Availability of drinking water, toilets, electricity, and educational materials
 - Impact of earthquakes, floods, or conflicts on infrastructure
 5. **Curriculum and Educational Content:**
 - Language of instruction
 - Alignment of curriculum with local needs and human rights principles
 - Availability of textbooks and educational materials
 6. **Social, Cultural, and Security Barriers:**
 - Cultural barriers to girls' education
 - Security threats to teachers and students
 - Local prohibitions and regulations
 7. **Alternative Educational Mechanisms:**
 - Home schools, religious or informal educational centers
 - Distance learning or digital programs
 - Role of civil society and charitable organizations
 8. **Data and Information Resources:**
 - Quality and transparency of data
 - Use of technology for data collection
 - Role of the local community in data validation

Data on girls deprived of education can be obtained from existing information in the Education Management Information System (EMIS), which is still available on the Ministry of Education's website. For example, all girls enrolled in grades seven to twelve in 2021 were subsequently prohibited from continuing their education, and their information, based on school/location, district, and province, is recorded in the EMIS. Similarly, female students in grades four, five, and six in 2021 have been progressively excluded from advancing to higher grade levels in subsequent years.



Managing Alternative Education

A credentialing system that would acknowledge the achievements of individual learners within an alternative education system is essential but challenging due to the Taliban's non-recognition, program variability, documentation gaps, and security risks. Proposed mechanisms include:

- **Portfolio-Based Assessment:** It is a systematic approach where learners curate a collection of work samples, such as essays, projects, presentations, and other relevant artifacts, to effectively showcase their knowledge, skills, and growth over time. This method not only emphasizes the quality of the work but also encourages critical reflection on learning processes. To ensure reliable and objective evaluation, it is essential to involve trained assessors who are knowledgeable about the subject matter and the specific criteria being assessed. Additionally, the assessment process should be guided by clear, explicit guidelines that outline expectations, evaluation rubrics, and the selection criteria for work samples, thereby providing both learners and assessors with a transparent framework for measurement.
- **Competency-Based Assessment:** Practical tests, structured interviews, and performance evaluations are utilized to rigorously assess job-relevant skills in candidates. These methods allow evaluators to gauge specific competencies essential for various roles, ensuring a comprehensive understanding of the individual's capabilities. This approach can be tailored to accommodate diverse programs and industries, allowing organizations to implement assessments that reflect their unique requirements and standards. By focusing on real-world applications and situational responses, competency-based assessments provide invaluable insights into a candidate's potential to succeed in their prospective role.
- **Third-Party Validation:** NGOs or academic institutions, such as those collaborating with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), play a crucial role in certifying the completion of various programs or initiatives. This process ensures that the certifications adhere to standardized criteria, which may include assessments of knowledge, skills acquired, and practical applications. Such validation not only enhances the credibility of the programs but also provides students with recognized qualifications that can facilitate their integration into host communities and improve their employment prospects. This collaborative approach underscores the importance of reliable and consistent standards in humanitarian efforts.



- **Digital Records:** Secure platforms, such as blockchain-based systems, have been effectively piloted by organizations like UNICEF in various crisis situations to ensure the integrity and traceability of essential data. These systems enable real-time tracking of progress in humanitarian efforts, improving transparency and accountability. However, the scalability of these solutions is significantly hindered by limited internet access in many affected areas, which can restrict the ability to collect, update, and share vital information promptly. To address these challenges, it may be necessary to develop offline capabilities or alternative methods to synchronize data once connectivity is restored.
- **Standards Alignment:** Mapping educational curricula to international benchmarks, such as UNESCO's Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4), is essential for ensuring that future educational policies are recognized globally. This alignment not only facilitates the transferability of educational credentials but also benefits girls who may emigrate to different countries. By adhering to established international standards, educational institutions can improve their credibility and help all students, particularly girls, receive acknowledgment for their academic achievements, regardless of potential changes in educational policies or geopolitical circumstances. Additionally, this kind of mapping fosters a more equitable and quality education system that aims to reduce disparities and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.
- **Articulation Agreements:** Collaborations with online universities and vocational programs worldwide, such as Coursera's specialized initiatives for refugees, create essential pathways for individuals seeking education and skills development. These partnerships not only provide access to a diverse range of courses but also offer tailored support and resources to help students navigate the challenges of their individual circumstances. By leveraging technology and innovative learning platforms, these programs empower learners to acquire valuable qualifications and enhance their employability in a competitive global job market.
- **Foundational Skills:** By emphasizing literacy, numeracy, and critical thinking, alternative education opportunities can still equip individuals with essential skills that are transferable across various contexts. Literacy not only involves reading and writing but also encompasses comprehension and communication abilities, enabling individuals to analyze and interpret information effectively. Numeracy extends beyond basic arithmetic to include data interpretation,



budgeting, and quantitative reasoning, which are crucial for problem-solving in everyday life. Critical thinking fosters the ability to evaluate arguments, identify biases, and make informed decisions, thereby encouraging independent thought and lifelong learning. Together, these foundational skills create a robust framework that prepares individuals to navigate complex challenges in both personal and professional environments.

Overseeing Implementation:

- **Collaboration:** NGOs, educators, and external bodies must work together in a coordinated effort to address social issues effectively. This collaboration should include regular meetings to identify shared goals, the development of joint programs that leverage each group's strengths, and the establishment of clear communication channels. By pooling resources and expertise, they can better implement educational initiatives, advocate for policy changes, and provide support to communities in need. Such synergy is essential for fostering sustainable development and achieving long-term positive outcomes.
- **Flexibility:** Systems must accommodate a wide range of learning contexts, including diverse educational environments such as Maji Mualims' traditional classrooms, online platforms, and hybrid settings. This adaptability should enable the use of various teaching methodologies, accommodate diverse learning styles, and cater to individual student needs, ensuring that all learners can engage meaningfully with the material, regardless of their background or circumstances. Additionally, the system should support various assessment methods and provide tailored resources to enhance the learning experience for each student.
- **Credibility:** For certificates to hold value, the Consortium must establish a strong sense of trust and credibility among students and educational institutions. This trust can be built through various factors, such as recognition of the issuing certificate by a legal body registered under a country's shadow education system or international curriculum bureaus. The rigor of the assessment process and the relevance of the skills or knowledge being certified are also important factors for consideration. Additionally, transparency about the standards used to grant the certificate and evidence of successful outcomes for previous holders can further enhance its credibility in the job market or academic settings.



- **Learner Support:** Trauma-informed processes should be designed to effectively address the unique challenges faced by girls in Afghanistan, particularly those who have experienced adverse childhood events or other forms of trauma. These approaches prioritize understanding the impact of trauma on emotional and psychological well-being, integrating a supportive framework that fosters safety, trust, and empowerment. By recognizing the varied manifestations of trauma in girls, a process can aim to establish an institutional body to support any girl who is introduced to it or identified. That approach promotes resilience, healing, and personal growth, ultimately leading to better emotional and educational outcomes.

Validating Credentials:

Credentials are crucial to developing a clear and reliable system for recognizing and validating the skills and knowledge acquired through various educational pathways and ensuring that students and academic institutions recognize them. Girls in Afghanistan, despite their desire to continue their education, are also seeking a validated certification upon completing their schooling. They take the risks to enroll in an alternative education; however, they also expect credentials for their efforts and risks.

The Consortium of Education, in collaboration with United Nations agencies, should establish an accreditation framework for these alternative educational programs and actively work in this direction. One important measure could be the creation of an online secondary school examination system to assess and certify students' educational levels. There are examples of such systems in some countries, such as the Cambridge online test.

Establish Systems for Quality Assurance of Alternative Education:

Quality assurance (QA) ensures effective alternative education despite no formal oversight. To ensure that alternative educational programs are of good quality and that students are truly learning, the Consortium should employ trained and knowledgeable teachers; use standard, simple, and accessible educational materials; conduct regular visits and assessments of student learning by trusted individuals such as community members or informal organizations; and include retraining programs for teachers to keep them up to date. Key strategies include:

- **Teacher Training:** Recruit local women as educators, ensuring that they receive comprehensive pre-service and in-service training focused on multi-grade teaching methodologies,



trauma-informed support, and classroom safety protocols. This initiative also emphasizes the importance of peer mentoring to foster a supportive community among educators. Since 2021, over 5,000 teachers have been trained through various NGOs, as reported by the International Rescue Committee (IRC). This training enhances teachers' ability to address diverse classroom needs and promote a safe learning environment for all students.

- **Curriculum/Materials:** Develop culturally sensitive curricula that are not only relevant to the diverse needs of students but also aligned with recognized international educational standards. This includes incorporating a variety of teaching strategies that cater to different learning styles and backgrounds. Ensure that the curricula are supported by high-quality textbooks and accessible digital tools, integrating technology where feasible to enhance the learning experience. Additionally, prioritize the inclusion of local cultural contexts and global perspectives to foster inclusivity and awareness among students. Regularly review and update the materials to maintain relevance and efficacy in a rapidly changing world.
- **Learning Environment:** To promote the well-being of students, it is crucial to create safe and inclusive online and in-person educational environments that include adequate sanitation and menstrual hygiene facilities. WASH modality can be redesigned and implemented. In 2021, only 40% of informal schools had access to Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene (WASH) services, according to UNICEF. This lack of facilities can lead to health issues, decreased school attendance, and hindered learning, particularly for young girls during menstruation. Implementing comprehensive online WASH programs in the alternative education models is essential to ensure all students can attend their classes actively and safely, fostering an environment where education can thrive for every child.
- **Monitoring & Evaluation:** Use formative assessments (e.g., quizzes, portfolios), track attendance discreetly, and collect community feedback through Shuras (community councils), which will include literate family members of students and the consortium representatives, to improve programs. The online system can include monitoring the duration of user activity with educational materials and tests for each subject and grade to ensure that students are learning. Additionally, a messaging system for guidance and contact with students can also be implemented. A teacher teaches the class to students online, students perform class activities, homework is assigned, and the teacher continuously evaluates the students' educational progress.



- **Community Involvement:** Both online and in-person Community District Committees (CDC) and school Shuras should actively monitor the performance of teachers and advocate for essential resources needed in educational settings. This collaborative approach, exemplified in the schools funded by the Aga Khan Foundation (AKF), where an impressive 80% of the funding comes directly from the community. This model not only fosters accountability and engagement among educators but also empowers local stakeholders to invest in the future of their children's education, ensuring that schools are tailored to meet the specific needs and aspirations of the community.
- **External Support:** NGOs such as Save the Children play a crucial role in the community by offering comprehensive training programs that enhance the skills and capabilities of local educators and online ones. These training initiatives focus on essential areas such as child protection, health, and education, ensuring that participants are well-equipped to address the specific needs of vulnerable populations. Additionally, Save the Children implements rigorous validation processes to assess and certify the effectiveness of these programs. This not only boosts the credibility of the organization within the communities it serves but also builds trust among stakeholders, including government agencies and potential donors, ultimately leading to more effective support for children and families in need.

IX. Ways to Advocate for Alternative Education under the Consortium:

Advocacy promotes alternative education across audiences:

- **Community Engagement:** Engage elders and local Imams to actively endorse girls' education by highlighting the strong support found within Islamic teachings, particularly the Quran's emphasis on the importance of acquiring knowledge. Organize community meetings where Shuras (community councils) and Parent-Teacher Associations (PTAs) can share compelling success stories from families who have experienced the benefits of girls' education firsthand. For instance, the Accelerated Education Program (AEP) successfully reached 10,000 parents, demonstrating significant increases in school enrollment rates. By showcasing these positive outcomes, the Consortium could foster a culture that values and prioritizes the education of girls within the community.



- **Media:** UNESCO's radio campaigns effectively reach an audience of 2 million listeners, strategically promoting the numerous benefits of education across diverse communities. By emphasizing the transformative power of learning, these campaigns aim to inspire individuals to pursue educational opportunities. Additionally, members of the diaspora, exercising cautious and deliberate use of social media platforms, play a crucial role in amplifying these messages. Their ability to share personal stories and insights enhances the impact of the campaigns, fostering a global conversation about the importance of education in driving societal change and individual empowerment.
- **Success Stories:** Anonymized stories of girls gaining valuable skills, such as coding, leadership, and entrepreneurship, serve as powerful inspirations for both their communities and potential funders. These narratives highlight the transformative journeys of young women who, despite facing various challenges, have overcome obstacles to achieve personal growth and empowerment. By sharing their experiences, these stories not only showcase the girls' resilience and determination but also demonstrate the positive impact of targeted programs and initiatives that support girls' education and skill development. As communities rally around these inspiring tales, funders are encouraged to invest in similar initiatives, recognizing the potential for lasting change and the importance of empowering the next generation of female leaders.
- **International Advocacy:** The United Nations and various NGOs are actively working to amplify the voices of women of Afghanistan in light of the recent ban on women's access to education. These groups are condemning the prohibition as a significant setback for gender equality and women's rights in Afghanistan. Creative ways should be explored to find ways to continue to put pressure on the Taliban for opening girls' schools.
- **Engaging Authorities:** It is essential to underscore the anticipated economic losses thoughtfully; for instance, the loss on higher education projected to reach US\$9.6 billion by the year 2066, highlighting the long-term financial impact on Afghanistan's economy.¹⁴ Additionally, it is crucial to note the internal divisions within the Taliban, where a faction of its leadership is

¹⁴ Samuel Hall, *The Costs of Suspension of Women's Higher Education in Afghanistan*, Education 2030 (UNESCO, October 2024), https://articles.unesco.org/sites/default/files/medias/fichiers/2024/10/08.Cost_of_suspension_of_women%27s_higher_education_full_report.pdf.



expressing support for the reversal of the restrictive ban. This shift in perspective could signal a potential change in policy direction, reflecting the complexities and fractures within the organization itself.¹⁵

X. Concluding Remarks:

No education modality can take the form of in-person education in a formal educational institution - that is, a school. However, we are not operating under normal circumstances. The current situation in Afghanistan regarding education, particularly for girls, is dire and complex. The Taliban's policies and emphasis on religious education have led to significant setbacks in educational access and quality. Addressing these challenges requires a nuanced understanding of the ideological, cultural, and infrastructural factors at play, as well as concerted efforts from the international community to support and advocate for the rights of girls and boys in Afghanistan to receive a comprehensive and inclusive education.

The establishment of a Consortium of Education for Afghanistan represents a critical step towards transforming the country's education system. By fostering collaboration among governments, NGOs, universities, and international organizations, this holistic approach could ensure that all children in Afghanistan, especially girls, can receive a quality education, paving the way for a brighter and more prosperous future for the nation.

Political opposition to the Taliban—whether internal or external—alongside Afghanistan's diasporic communities and international advocates for education, must confront three sobering but critical realities when strategizing for the future of girls' education in Afghanistan.

First, it is increasingly unlikely that the Taliban will fully reopen secondary and higher education for girls in any meaningful or sustained way. Despite sporadic internal debates and occasional signals of moderation, the ideological core of the Taliban remains resistant to female education, viewing it as a threat to their sociopolitical vision. This resistance is not merely tactical—it is deeply embedded in their worldview and governance model.

¹⁵ Associated Press, "Taliban Deputy Presses Leader to End Education Bans on Afghan Women and Girls," *World, PBS News*, January 19, 2025, <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/world/taliban-deputy-presses-leader-to-end-education-bans-on-afghan-women-and-girls>.



Second, even in the event that schools are reopened, the content and structure of education under Taliban rule will likely be compromised. The curriculum may be stripped of scientific rigor, critical thinking, and global relevance, replaced instead with ideologically driven narratives that reinforce a "Talibanized" society. In such a system, education becomes a tool of indoctrination rather than empowerment, limiting girls' ability to participate meaningfully in civic life or the global economy.

Third, and most crucially, alternative education models—whether through underground schools, online platforms, community-led initiatives, or international partnerships—must be recognized not as stopgaps, but as vital lifelines. While these alternatives may lack formal accreditation or infrastructure, they preserve the possibility of learning, growth, and future agency for girls in Afghanistan. In the absence of state support, civil society and global actors must invest in these imperfect but indispensable pathways to ensure that education does not vanish from the lives of an entire generation.

Therefore, I reiterate my statement I delivered to the International Republican Institute in Washington, D.C. in May 2024: “Bad education is better than no education in Afghanistan under the Taliban.”



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