

Rahela Trust



Second Annual Afghan Diaspora Academic Conference

Report 2022



About Us

We are a UK-based, Afghan-led charity striving to create positive and progressive change in Afghanistan.

We will do this by providing higher education scholarships to talented, underprivileged women from rural Afghanistan, as well as leadership training and mentoring, and access to global professional networks.

Our scholar's contributions to civic life will ultimately lead to a more balanced and equal society in Afghanistan. They are each committed to building a future where women are full participants and leaders in society.

By growing a community of educated young women committed to improving the lives of women in Afghanistan, Rahela Trust envisages a society where women's rights are respected. Where women are fully involved in the social, political, and economic aspects of life.

We don't believe supporting women's education stops at teaching.

Building networks within the 6,500,000-member Afghan diaspora – equivalent to 18.4% of the Afghan total population – collaborating with different organisations, groups and collectives, mobilising volunteers from the diaspora and ally community is also vital. Given our extensive in-country networks, we are committed to expanding this focus.

This is why we are endeavouring to host an annual conference, whereby the Afghan diaspora and their allies can come together to share new research, discover new approaches and form closer connections with each other.



Conference Goals

Afghanistan's fall to the Taliban in August 2021 is working to eradicate 20 years of progress in the fight for women's rights and academic development. Women's liberties have been severely restricted, their human rights disregarded and paths to economic freedom curtailed.

Rahela Trust's Second Annual Conference sought to achieve the goals outlined below.

- ✓ Outline new research produced by academics across the Afghan diaspora in Europe.
- ✓ Provide a source of hope to Afghan women by sparking conversations and exploring new solutions to women's education in Afghanistan.
- ✓ Establish new, and deepen existing, connections with the diaspora and allies. Create opportunities to gain support for Rahela Trust.



Key Information

The conference took place on **Monday 17th October 2022** at the University of Cambridge's Cripps Court, Magdalene College. It was made possible by the generous support of the Refugee Council, Omid International, ECRE, and the University of Cambridge.

45 people across various areas including university academics, Afghan refugees, British allies, and representatives from the Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO) attended in person. 30 individuals virtually joined us on Zoom.

Key Speakers



We had the honour of hosting some incredible speakers at this year's conference. This included Dr. Rangin Dadfar Spanta [former Minister of Foreign Affairs of Afghanistan], Fawzia Koofi and Shukria Barakzai.

Academics delivering presentations to audiences included:

- Wahidullah Azizi
- Malia Shir M
- Dr. Fahimeh Robiolle
- Dr. Sarajuddin Isar
- Nargis Sadiq
- Walid Halimi
- Nazila Jamshidi
- Dr. Marissa Quie
- Rahela Sidiqi

The positive power of education for Afghan women was illustrated by the strong voices of five Afghan women, all of whom had to flee to Europe. Each of them managed to establish themselves in a foreign society and build success anyone would be proud of.

They demonstrated great courage and we're grateful to them for sharing their stories with us.

Research Conclusions & Recommendations

1

The corruption and aid nexus in Afghanistan by Wahidullah Azizi

- The widespread corruption during the last two decades is unlikely to disappear anytime soon
- There is a corruption risk in the current humanitarian aid distribution
- On top of a Taliban concern to divert the aid, mismanagement and effectiveness still loom
- No amount of aid can substitute for a self-reliant economy that will benefit the people of Afghanistan but simultaneously avoid reaching the Taliban – a challenge with no clear prospects

2

The challenges to accessing secondary and tertiary education faced by women and girls in Afghanistan by Malia Shir M

- Taliban has not improved education, instead has tended to reinforce cultural practices that hinder the education of females
- The reemergence of the Taliban regime is a setback to the progress made by women's networks, global connectivity, and collaborations between state actors and international organizations
- Findings suggest a non-homogeneous attitude toward female education in different parts (North, south, and northeast) of Afghanistan
- International non-governmental organizations that have focused on promoting the education of Afghan women and girls should adopt a long-term perspective on gender equality by intensifying efforts in increasing Afghan women's and girls' access to media and the Internet, financial and political support for Afghan women's civil society, as well as strengthening Afghan institutions to be more gender-responsive
- Some enlightened individuals from the Pashtun ethnic group can also be made key facilitators of women's education programs in Afghanistan

Research Conclusions & Recommendations

3

Explore opportunities to invest in the education of Afghan women and girls by Fahimeh Robiolle

In general, to succeed in the challenge of education, it is necessary that the investment approach be global, within a structure that takes into account a set of academic, economic, societal, and cultural parameters with an effective monitoring system according to the different geographical areas where the girls and women are located:

- In Afghanistan, taking into account the diverse security, family and geographical situations of girls and women,
- In the neighbouring countries, taking into account the complexity and helplessness of the refugees who are desperately waiting for a way out
- Negotiate the acceptance of female students who are in the neighbouring countries with no way, to be accepted via sponsorships from a university (Europe, USA, Canada,...)
- In addition, in the host countries, taking into account the intercultural aspects and challenges of integration

Physiologic assistance has to be taken into the consideration in any case.

4

The Political Economy of Taxation: Negotiating Taxes and Allocating Rents by Dr. Sarajuddin Isar

- The nature of political settlement (power configuration) has been subject to shifts and changes, historically and in post-Bonn Afghanistan
- The political settlement was subject to exclusivity and inclusivity (centralising power or delegating power)
- Delegating power sustained order, centralising power challenged order
- Rent distribution (aid money) played a key role in sustaining or disrupting political settlement
- The current Taliban (August 2021 - present) is an exclusive and over-centralised political settlement (purely consisting of Mullas and Pashtuns)
- Coercive taxation- no reciprocity no fiscal social contract
- No transparency in the expenditure, they just tax
- UN cash delivery (humanitarian assistance), 1.2BN since Dec 2021
- But there is still a precarious economic situation where there are 20 million in starvation and hunger, and poverty, unemployment is on the rise

Research Conclusions & Recommendations

5

Exploring mechanisms for effective collaboration with Afghan diaspora groups in the UK and EU by Nargis Sadiq and Walid Halimi

- In nutshell, it is argued that the Afghan diaspora is dispersed so widely and lacks a unified social hub - as well as coordination and cooperation
- The diaspora should establish a coordination body and register every single diaspora organisation working for Afghans abroad or in the country, serving the community a pool of knowledge and a chance for information to be used systematically
- Afghanistan remains a conservative society, controlled by tribal influences and so-called religious individuals, our contemporary global village is blessed with a phenomenal tool - technology - that knocks on every single door of the globe, wanted or not
- The internet permits both academics and NGOs to reach their beneficiaries, provide training and alleviate online business environments
- Especially providing basic internet services and designing preliminary and intermediate education through online courses is a feasible option worth investing in

6

Developing information hubs on education for Afghan refugees and asylum seekers by Nazila Jamshidi

- An information hub can connect refugees to resources so they can easily access the information they need in the search for education
- A hub serves as a single source that provides holistic knowledge about the available resources and step-by-step guides for benefiting the resources, activities, and materials offered by various organizations and stakeholders, considering the complex nature of the refugees' challenges
- The hub should
 - provide all necessary information regarding the educational resources, laws, country policies, and local organizations in the countries that exist for Afghan refugees
 - connect various organizations, NGOs, institutions, and individuals that support Afghan refugees' education through different means. It should create a platform for multiple stakeholders to work together towards a common goal
 - the information should be easily accessible and contain concise, up-to-date, and easy-to-understand content in both local —Dari and Pashtu— and English languages

Research Conclusions & Recommendations

7

Probing remote solutions to Afghan women's education by Dr. Marissa Quie and Rahela Sidiqi

- The right to education is recognised in international law and policy as a 'multiplier right' that improves health, socioeconomic, political and cultural development. It is central to sustainable development
- Afghan women can be educated, enabled, and empowered under the current conditions via remote learning
- Crucially, we probe a programme for action to help safeguard women falling behind uncovering opportunities for distance mentoring in education and in medicine and business and vocational work
- Carefully targeted partnerships can constructively encourage more egalitarian trajectories in the future.
- Provision of pre-loaded solar powered tablets that offer bilingual learning packages
- Packages for food security, financial support and internet costs
- Gathering a database of diaspora groups – especially former military and government interpreters for translation support and offering training on effective support
- Gathering a database of university teachers and students to act as mentors
- Development of a sponsorship/ "Sisterhood" system to support individual scholars
- Creation of subject-specialised mentoring circles in medicine, business, journalism, law etc. sourced from Cambridge, diaspora groups and further afield
- Creation of volunteer trauma support and counselling unit to accompany learning materials

Takeaways

Afghanistan has become a virtual prison for its female population. Education is a key power tool in the fight against authoritarian regimes, while mentorship empowers individuals to be aware of their strengths.

The people of Afghanistan are suffering yet another period of political and economic instability, and gender injustice. There is an urgent need to take action to limit the damage and build the foundations for a better and more equitable Afghanistan.



Calls to Action

- * Establish information hubs to provide stability, ease of access and consistency of information
- * Mobilise and build a stronger diaspora community who can meaningfully contribute to society in Afghanistan
- * Promote education as a development tool
- * Invest in new ways to educate young Afghan women - such as remote solutions

Feedback

Key Speakers

We will do this by providing university scholarships to talented, underprivileged women in Afghanistan, as well as leadership training and mentoring, and access to global professional networks.

Researchers

Wahid Azizi

"Overall, the conference was great. I enjoyed the presentations from other speakers and researchers. The theme of the conference was also timely and relevant to the events in Afghanistan. I'd like to have seen greater numbers of participants".

Nazila Jamshidi

"I enjoyed the level of expertise, positive attitudes, and willingness to explain concepts...I also appreciated the clarity of visual aids and handouts and opportunities to ask questions by the participants. I've learned a great deal for application in both research and future programs for facilitating access of Afghan women to education. Wonderful, insightful, thought-provoking, and well-presented!"

Success Stories

Maryam Farzami

"Despite the technical problems, the conference was perfect and inspiring. The success stories of the scholars from inside Afghanistan were interesting to me.

There was a lack of drinking water for the participants. I would have liked to have seen more tweets and social media posts during and after the event!"

Audience Members

Mel Bradley MBE

"I thought the conference was brilliantly inspiring and moving. Everyone came away pleased to have been there. I would have liked to have seen more time allocated to networking and perhaps fewer presentations to allow for that. I'd also suggest more flexibility in timings to allow for overrun which does always happen. I hope to see more people attend next time, it would be totally worth their while!"

Tongming Wang

"Currently I am a student at the University of Southampton. I volunteered to take notes and questions at this event. I found 'developing information hubs' for Afghan refugees and asylum seekers the most fascinating topic. Overall I thought it was a really wonderful conference and I'd definitely get involved again".

Anonymous

"In the time of hopelessness, we have observed today that there are various mechanisms to realise Afghan's rights to education - both inside and outside the country. I think speaking about such an organisation and its aim to facilitate education to girls on different platforms is important. It also helps to connect with similar organisations. I think we need to bring more voices to the room and do it in different societies among difference diaspora communities".