

**Qabi Bay, Afghanistan**  
**Canadian Women for Women in Afghanistan**  
**[www.cw4wafghan.ca](http://www.cw4wafghan.ca)**

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## Qabi Bay, Kabul Province, Afghanistan

Afghanistan is a country with a rich and diverse cultural heritage, at the crossroads of east and west and an important point on the historic Silk Road trading route. Almost half of Afghanistan's population is between the ages of 0 - 14, which means a huge potential for them to shape the future of their country, if given opportunities.

Qabi Bay is a village 30 km to the south east of the capital city of Kabul. It has a population of about 37,000. In Qabi Bay, the predominant languages spoken are Dari and Pashtun, and the life expectancy is 64.96 years. About half of households in Qabi Bay have access to electricity on the national grid, for 5-6 hours a day. 35% of households in Qabi Bay have access to a safe municipal water source, and 40% of households rely on unimproved water and sanitation sources such as shared latrines. Years of conflict, particularly under Taliban rule, destroyed adequate water infrastructure in Qabi Bay.

Since 2001, Afghanistan has seen an expansion of its active civil society, from women's rights organizations to community banking initiatives. There is also a vibrant public culture with news media and arts initiatives.

53% of households have a TV, which is a popular source of both entertainment and news about current events. Soccer clubs and tea houses are some public places to gather for men, but not women. Both boys and girls take part in kite flying, a popular pastime.

**The Challenge:** In recent decades, Afghanistan has experienced many years of conflict and war, including terrorist attacks which required the presence of the military from Canada and other Western countries. In 2004, Afghanistan became a democratic state with its own constitution, but the conflict has not ended. This has meant that Afghan people, especially women and girls, are often not free to live their lives, work, or attend school.

Because Qabi Bay is rural, the walk to school is long and often dangerous. Many parents are reluctant to allow their daughters to attend school in this environment, where risk of violence and natural disasters are real. Cultural practices, such as early marriage, also create barriers for girls who want to attend school. Many families in Afghanistan also live in poverty, meaning that sometimes, children leave school in order to work and support their families. After years of war, teachers have not had opportunities for training and schools often lack basic resources like desks, books, and washrooms. This often means that, in order for children to attend school, their parents have to pay extra costs for basic school supplies.

Every public school has a council of teachers and parents, who are often very effective in encouraging school enrollment and addressing parental concerns about safe learning spaces for their children - especially girls. Today, more children attend school than at any time in Afghanistan's history. 39% of students in Afghan schools are now girls!

## Glossary

**Early Marriage:** Any marriage where at least one of the parties is under the age of 18. It is considered to be a form of forced marriage since one or both parties cannot express full, free, and informed consent. Globally, this practice disproportionately affects girls, disrupting their education, making them more vulnerable to violence and maternal mortality, and preventing their full participation in society.

**Life Expectancy:** The average age of death in a population. Life expectancies can reflect global inequalities. Higher income countries typically have high life expectancies and lower income countries have lower life expectancies.

**Pit Latrine:** The simple pit latrine is a toilet dug into the ground. It is the cheapest and most basic form of improved sanitation available.

**Unimproved Sanitation Sources:** Sanitation facilities that are considered unsafe and do not ensure a hygienic separation of human excreta from human contact. Some examples include pit latrines without covers or bucket latrines.

**Unimproved Water Sources:** Water sources that are not considered safe and do not meet standards of water quality. Some examples include unprotected dug wells or surface water from rivers, lakes, or streams.

## Mirwais

28 year old man

Single

Lives with parents, 3 brothers and 2 sisters

Mirwais started teaching after he graduated high school. Then, he took the principal's examination and became a school principal. Only 12% of exam takers passed, and Mirwais feels lucky to be among them. He became the principal of two schools (a boys' school and a girls' school) three weeks ago. The girls' school has about 1000 students and 29 teachers, and the boys' school has 1500 boys and 27 teachers.

The schools are in very old buildings that are in terrible shape. Mirwais is working hard to fix things, but they don't have enough of anything.

Mirwais is also trying to support the girls. For example, the girls don't have a science laboratory for their science classes, while the boys do. The girls can't study at the boys' school, because Qabi Bay is a small village and some of the people are conservative. Mirwais doesn't want parents to stop allowing their daughters to attend.

There is also no library and Mirwais wants to fix this. With help to build learning resources, Mirwais believes that teachers will be able to give quality lessons, and the girls can do as well as the boys.

## Sayed

45 year old man

Married

Father of 3 daughters and 6 sons

Sayed is an agricultural labourer who grows grains on a farm near the village. Unlike his wife, Sayed was allowed to attend primary school and learned to read and write. He and his wife make decisions together, although it isn't common in Qabi Bay for men to consult their wives.

Sayed has three daughters. His 14 year old daughter is eager to attend school, but his older two daughters are adults now and cannot read or write. Years ago, Sayed and his wife decided it was not safe for their daughters to attend school. The nearest school was far away, in another village, and the girls would have had to walk alone for hours each day to get there and back. The country is still at war, and Sayed knows that there are people who do not want women to be out in public. He sees girls' schools in other provinces being attacked and burnt down, and girls having acid sprayed at them.

Recently, a girls' school opened in Qabi Bay, close to Sayed's house. Now that students can easily walk to school, it is safer, so Sayed and his wife have let their younger daughter go to school. Sayed now notices his daughter teaching her mother and siblings to read some basic books, which makes Sayed very happy.

## Zakia

47 year old woman  
Widowed  
Mother of 5 daughters

Zakia has five children. When she was a child, she was very interested in going to school. Unfortunately, her father would not allow it. When she was 12 years old, her parents decided to make her marry. A few years later, she lost her husband during the war in Afghanistan. Her five children were all small and they needed clothing, food and school. They were suffering. She had an image of a beautiful and comfortable life for her children, so she had to work to support her family.

She decided to take vocational courses to learn how to make clothes for people. As a tailor, she could make Afghan local clothing in the best styles, baby clothes, socks, shirts, hats, and so on. Many people would ask her to make dresses for them — even people from outside Qabi Bay would come to order clothes from her! Unfortunately, her business did not go well because she couldn't read and write. She would forget about someone who borrowed from her because she could not write down transactions.

Zakia knew that if she were able to read and write, she could easily count her money and take care of her business. Then, she could financially support her five daughters to continue their education. They tell her how, if she learned how to read in English, she could use her cell phone, Viber, Facebook and the internet to display her products!

## Salma

14 year old girl  
Lives with 2 sisters, 6 brothers, and parents

Salma is 14 years old and studies in the 7th grade at the school for girls. She started school at age 6. Her favourite subjects are the Dari and Pashto languages, and she likes learning about the poets and about the Prophet.

Salma has two sisters and six brothers. Two of her younger brothers go to school, but neither of her sisters went to school. They are 19 and 21 and they are illiterate. They could not go to school when they were younger because of the war. Now, they just stay at home. But Salma has been teaching them a little Quran and getting them to read this way. She does this in her spare time, and it makes her happy that she can help her family. They support her a lot, in going to school and with other things.

In the future, Salma plans to complete grade 12 and then study to become a doctor. Her younger brother has a disability because her mother was injured by the war during her pregnancy. Salma wants to help children with disabilities, and to serve her country in the future.

Overall, she likes her school and the conditions are good for girls, but they lack textbooks. The teachers work very hard to do a good job and Salma likes the principal at her school.

## **Zubaida**

63 year old woman

Widowed

Lives with son, daughter-in-law and 4 grandchildren

Zubaida graduated from the Faculty of Science at Kabul University in 1978. For the past eight years, she has been teaching chemistry and biology at the girls' school. Prior to being a teacher, she held different positions in the Department of Women's Affairs and as principal of a girls' school in Kandahar. In any school Zubaida has worked in, she sees a lack of resources, such as libraries or books.

As an experienced teacher, Zubaida has lots of knowledge and skills, but sometimes has trouble transferring them to her students. She also lacks confidence in her teaching methods. She wishes she could attend a teacher training to learn how to help students to learn faster and better. For example, she would like to learn how to incorporate games, group work, and interaction in her teaching. Zubaida also wants her school to have a library with lots of books for the students.

For the future, she wants security in her country so that her students can study in peace, and not worry about war.

## Canadian Women for Women in Afghanistan (CW4WAfghan)



Canadian Women for Women in Afghanistan (CW4WAfghan) was founded in 1998 to advance education and educational opportunities for Afghan women and their families and to educate Canadians about human rights in Afghanistan. CW4WAfghan's mission is that Canadians take action, in

partnership with Afghan women, towards improving conditions of human rights, ending women's oppression, and providing opportunities for Afghan women to live their lives with dignity, certainty and purpose. The organization has about 4,000 registered supporters from chapters in Alberta, British Columbia, Manitoba, and Ontario. In Afghanistan, a dynamic and talented team of Afghan professionals manage, implement, monitor and provide support services for CW4WAfghan's programs and operations.

Read more: <https://www.cw4wafghan.ca/>

### Organization Response

CW4WAfghan works in partnership with communities all across Afghanistan, in large cities and remote rural areas, to address challenges faced by women and girls. This cooperative approach is important, because it means Afghan people can choose the solutions that work best for them, their culture and experiences. Although their focus is on the human rights of Afghan women and

girls, they believe this can only be achieved with the cooperation of men, boys and communities as a whole.

CW4WAfghan focuses on three Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs): Quality Education, Gender Equality, and Reduced Inequalities, but recognizes that sustainable development is best achieved when the Sustainable Development Goals are pursued alongside one another. Increasing literacy is a powerful way to promote sustainable development generally. Research from around the world shows that girls who are educated are safer, healthier, have more work opportunities, and greater participation in public life, including the economy and local and national government. Recovery from war is also more sustainable where women are directly involved. When women and girls are educated, whole societies benefit. Research has even shown that educating girls is a powerful way to fight climate change!

CW4WAfghan supports local communities in Afghanistan to enhance educational resources, and break down the barriers women and girls face in accessing quality education. They do this by developing and offering training and supports for teachers to deliver their classes in ways that are more inclusive for girls and accessible for students with disabilities, building libraries and sharing books and online resources, and offering literacy classes to women and girls who were prevented from attending school when they were children because of war in Afghanistan. They work to support an intergenerational culture of reading, because evidence from their own programs shows that literate mothers raise educated children, and this improves quality of life for all.