

ARTF RESULTS STORIES 2020



**Higher Education Project Brings
Modernity to Afghan Universities**

**Afghanistan
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HIGHER EDUCATION PROJECT BRINGS MODERNITY TO AFGHAN UNIVERSITIES

The [Higher Education Development Project](#) (HEDP) aims to improve access to higher education and to raise its quality and relevance. It supports the reforms initiated through the National Higher Education Strategic Plan II and focuses on outcomes and results rather than inputs. The project is building capacity in public universities through scholarships and training; focusing on Outcome-Based Education and Student-Centered Learning; fostering research; and encouraging e-learning. It promotes female enrollment, in particular, in public universities through a series of initiatives. HEDP is implemented by the Ministry of Higher Education. It is supported by an ARTF grant of \$55 million. It has approved funding from July 7, 2015, to December 21, 2022.



CHALLENGES

INCREASED FEMALE ENROLLMENT IN HIGHER EDUCATION is one of many achievements in securing women's equality and empowerment in the last decade in Afghanistan. Others include the guarantee of equal rights for women in the constitution, new employment opportunities, and greater participation in local and national governance.

Yet, women remain severely underrepresented in all sectors even though they make up almost half of the population in Afghanistan. Decades of conflict in Afghanistan as well as traditional cultural and social norms have pushed women into disadvantaged positions, making their empowerment, in general, and access to education, in particular, a challenge.



APPROACH

HEDP ADDRESSES THE UNDERLYING FACTORS that impede access to higher education for both women and men. It is taking measures to increase enrollment in key priority disciplines (those that contribute to economic and social development), especially female enrollment; promote student-centered learning; foster research and collaboration to improve teaching and learning; and expand access to online education resources.

RESULTS

Institutional development plans: By 2019, 13 public universities had instituted five-year plans in line with the National Higher Education Strategic Plan.

University enrollment: Total enrollment in priority degree programs in public universities increased from 64,200 students in 2015 to 81,900 in 2019.

Female enrollment: Enrollment in the first year of university in priority degree programs increased from 3,000 female students in 2015 to 5,300 in 2019.

Academic staff: Full-time staff with at least a Master's degree in priority degree programs increased from 700 in 2015 to 1,600 in 2019.

“Besides their traditional classes on campus in Kandahar, the students can attend online courses from different universities to learn new skills and take advantage of global technology to cultivate an international perspective.”

— **Sayed Ahmad Mahboobi**, computer science lecturer, Kandahar University, on the importance of modern technology



Professional Development Centers Bring Modernity to Afghan Universities

Teaching at Kandahar University has changed, moving away from traditional methods to modern techniques and engaging students more effectively. This is an outcome of establishing Professional Development Centers (PDC) in public universities nationwide in 2017, a concept mooted by the [Ministry of Higher Education](#).

Computer science lecturer Sayed Ahmad Mahboobi, 38, and his colleagues from different faculties were among the first to embrace the idea at Kandahar University, when they designated a room in the literature department to host a PDC. What was once a multipurpose administrative storage room is now a welcoming, collaborative space for staff to learn, share, and innovate.

“It was very important to establish this center,” Mahboobi says, “because we know that academic development needs regular training and workshops to be aware of the new updates in the world.”

The center, run by the university, was set up and equipped under HEDP, which also provided a solar power system to ensure a sustainable electricity supply.

So far, the PDC has conducted 15 internal workshops, facilitated by external experts or university staff depending on the topic. Each workshop sets out to tackle a different area that staff members at Kandahar University have identified for their improvement. They focus on modern teaching methods, research methods, quality assurance, accreditation issues, and e-learning technology in teaching and learning.

The PDC also provides staff the opportunity to share their international professional experiences. “Many of our lecturers and senior management staff attend international workshops and seminars and when they come back, it is very important that they share what they have learned in those workshops with faculty and students,” says Mahboobi.

Impact on Students

Mahboobi has also examined the impact of the professional development workshops on students. In an informal survey, he found that students were very happy that their teacher had participated in a PDC workshop, saying that the new teaching method was effective and they remained focused for the entire duration of the class.

One of the teachers who attended a modern teaching methods workshop, Shahzad Gul Ahmadzai, 35, an English lecturer, says that he changed his teaching method after the workshop. “When I applied [what I learned] to my classes, the students became more interested in their lessons,” he says.

Over 300 students in Kandahar University have also benefited directly from the PDC. “Besides their traditional classes on campus in Kandahar,” Mahboobi says, “the students can attend online courses from different universities to learn new skills and take advantage of global technology to cultivate an international perspective.”

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— Sayed Ahmad Mahboobi, computer science lecturer, Kandahar University



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