

Afghanistan: Few Jobs for Educated Women

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Graduates forced to stay at home or turn to menial tasks to make a living.

Although 25-year-old Nazia has a university degree and is desperate to find work, she spends her days at home raising chickens and tending cattle.

The mother-of-three, who lives in the village of Taqi Shah in Logar's Pul-e Alam district, said that after completing her high school education in Afghanistan she went on to graduate in Dari literature from a university in Iran.

But Nazia has been unable to find work suitable for someone with her qualifications.

"I have been looking for a government job for the last six years, but not a single department has yet given me a chance," she said.

More than half the educated women she knew - having overcome numerous obstacles to pursue their education - had also failed to find work, she continued.

"The problem is getting worse and the government needs to take steps to provide women with employment," she said.

Women in Logar are calling for job creation schemes to correct a massive imbalance in the work market, warning that without affirmative action little is likely to change.

Social activists said that hundreds of people with bachelors and even masters degrees have found it impossible to find work. One of the problems they raise is that widespread administrative corruption means that candidates are selected on the basis of connections rather than personal achievement.

The situation is particularly discouraging given the difficulties many women and girls have in accessing education.

Raqiba, a 22-year old from the village of Taqi Shah, said that women and girls were interested in learning to read and write but were denied the opportunity.

"Many women in Logar province are illiterate and uneducated; many families don't let their daughters go to school and women suffer very much from a lack of available work," she said.

Armed insurgents have reportedly banned girls from continuing their education beyond the sixth grade in schools in the districts of Pul-e Alam, Baraki Barak, Muhammad Aghah and Khoshi. Local activist Karima said that many girls schools in these areas had been shut down altogether.

Local officials say that they are busy creating a variety of routes for women to find work, including internships and referrals to government departments.

Shaima Zargar, the director of Logar's women's affairs department, told IWPR that hundreds of women would be recruited in this way.

"We have had some major achievements for women in the past few years," she said. "Now opportunities have been created for 100 girls and women to work and gain experience in foundations, others organisations and government departments. I can say the rate of women's unemployment has decreased from what it was in the past."

Shah Khan Walizoy, director of Logar's department of labour, social affairs, martyrs and the disabled, said that his department had not only created job opportunities for hundreds of women but had also provided a range of practical trainings.

In addition, he continued, the office of the Logar governor had joined the women's affairs department to provide internships for many female graduates with little work experience.

"What has been done for Logar's women so far hasn't been enough, but many efforts have nevertheless been made to improve their lives in recent years," he continued. "We plan to increase these efforts too."

Women's rights activist Anita Ghazanfari said that there had been significant gains in gender equality over the years.

“Compared to the past, action is being taken to combat unemployment across the country. Many women have been appointed to roles within government and both girls and boys study in order to find jobs in this area,” she said, although she also acknowledged that developments had not gone far enough.

Some local women argue that rather than chasing an office job, their contemporaries would be better off turning to more practical ways of earning a living.

Fatima, 20, said women shouldn’t bother pursuing an education to get a government job, arguing that many in her village made good money through agricultural projects and through running small businesses.

“I work with livestock and have done well out of it,” she continued, adding that she had never depended on government-run schemes.

“I started off by buying 15 chickens and then doubled this number, and now I sell the eggs and support my family. I’ve received trainings in raising the chickens and if women want to [follow this path], they will never lack work.”

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