



PROJECT FACT SHEET
Featured Project October 2017

[Sahar](#)

Early Marriage Prevention Initiative



Mission of Sahar

Sahar's mission is to create educational opportunities in Afghanistan that empower and inspire children and their families to build peaceful, just, and life-affirming communities.

Life Challenges of the Women Served

Because of a variety of cultural and economic issues, girls face greater risks than boys of failure to continue their education through secondary school in Afghanistan. Girls' schools continue to be targeted by violent extremists, and there continues to be a stigma against girls' education in the country where the Taliban very recently outlawed it. For those who do attend school, the average number of girls' attendance is eight years. There is a dramatic dropout rate for girls around 12-13 years old due to them being forced into early marriage and their husbands or parents encouraging them to leave school. According to recent data from the UN Population Fund, nearly 57 percent of girls in Afghanistan are married before the legal age of 16. Of these



girls, about 40 percent are married between 10 and 13 years old. Early marriages occur for girls in rural areas twice as often as those in urban areas.

Reasons for early marriage include “bride price,” where the groom pays money to the bride’s family and thereby brings money into poverty-stricken families, and child engagement and “honor” situations where families feel the pressure to marry a girl at a young age before

any perceived or real threats to her virtue may lower her prospects for marriage. Lack of education and low socioeconomic status contribute to the sustained practice of early marriage as well, creating a vicious circle. For example, 63 percent of girls with no education marry before 18, while 45 percent of girls with primary education do, and only 20 percent of girls with secondary education do. Child marriage often compromises a girl’s health and development by resulting in early pregnancy and social isolation, and placing her at an increased risk of domestic violence. Interrupting a girl’s schooling limits her opportunities for career and vocational advancement. In addition to limiting girls’ education, early marriage can lead to complications of pregnancy and childbirth, which are the leading cause of death in young women ages 15-19. The maternal mortality rate in Afghanistan is 396 deaths/100,000 live births, and the infant mortality rate is 112.8 deaths/1,000 births.

The Project

The DFW grant will enable Sahar’s second phase of the Early Marriage Prevention Initiative. The project integrates conversations about early marriage and education within schools and with community leaders in Balkh Province, Afghanistan. The initiative solidifies the long-term importance of educating girls within the cultural framework, and teaches girls their rights not to marry early and to stay in school. The main goal of the Early Marriage Prevention Initiative is to decrease student dropouts due to early marriage in the target population and to learn interventions for preventing them. The grant will enable Sahar to expand its pilot project to two additional schools. Sahar is the only non-profit working on early marriage prevention in the Province.



The in-school curriculum is made up of 12 sessions aimed at increasing girls' knowledge of their rights not to marry until age 16. These sessions combine innovative practices of education, like guest lecturers, with leadership development activities designed specifically for the target population. The curriculum was designed by Afghan women and is the only such curriculum that exists for an Afghan context.

Community engagement is created by meetings with community leaders such as council members, religious leaders, school principals and village elders, as well as the mothers and fathers of the participating girls. The pilot project showed that the involvement of men such as fathers and other religious leaders in the girls' lives was one of the most impactful for the girls.

The Early Marriage Prevention Initiative, Phase Two, will directly impact approximately 500 Afghan girls in grades 5-12. The program will indirectly impact more than 3,600 people, including family members of the girls directly impacted, community, religious and school leaders, and other students at the school who will be exposed to the curriculum secondhand from the students and teachers involved. The population indirectly impacted will be Afghan children and adults in Balkh province, about half of whom will be women and girls.

The long-term vision of the initiative is to expand beyond the pilot schools and eventually be implemented in all the schools in Balkh Province, and then to be incorporated into the national Ministry of Education curriculum where early marriage is causing school dropout.

Sustainable Development Goals



Questions for Discussion

1. Do you think it is possible to overcome long-term cultural practices surrounding early marriage?
2. How do you think this project will help promote self-sufficiency for women?
3. What effect could increased education opportunities have on Afghanistan's economy?

The Project Budget and How DFW's Donations Will Be Used

DFW's donation of \$50,000 for one year will be equally divided between two schools. The grant will pay for transportation to the sites of the project, communications such as internet and cell phones, office rent and maintenance, curriculum supplies and utilities. The largest portion of the budget will be spent on personnel.

Direct Impact: 500 Indirect Impact: 3,600

Item		Total
Transport	Fuel and maintenance of transport to project sites.	\$2,850
Communications	Cell phone Top-up cards, internet service.	\$1,500
Office	Office and curriculum supplies and materials, building maintenance, equipment maintenance, office rent.	\$3,730
Utilities	Electric, gas, heating fuel, misc. repairs, classroom heating and cooling.	\$3,375
Personnel	Afghan Project Manager, Sahar Afghan Fellow Manager, two Early Marriage Trainers, Financial Accountant, Early Marriage Monitor and Evaluation, three drivers, three guards, guest speaker fees, graduation ceremony, staff lunches	\$38,545
TOTAL EXPENSES		\$50,000

Why We Love This Project

We love this project because it is very specific and locally developed in Afghanistan to reduce early marriage and raise awareness in the community about the benefits of delaying marriage. The project occurs in successful schools and includes great collaborators.

Evidence of Success

- Sahar has built thirteen schools in Afghanistan, which educate 18,000 girls annually, expanding access to education for brighter futures for all Afghan children.
- Their most recent project allows 3,000 girls to attend school in a sustainable new building in Mazar-i-Sharif. The new building shows how Sahar is creating lasting positive change in Afghan communities by partnering with the Ministry of Education and the local community to redesign school buildings to be environmentally sustainable, earthquake resistant, comfortable, and girl-centered.
- Sahar serves 1,500 girls each year with their Computer Literacy Programs. Since beginning the computer program, they have maintained an 80 percent graduation rate.
- Sahar's teacher training center has graduated hundreds of teachers, more than 70 percent of which are women. These new teachers are giving thousands of Afghan girls access to education they otherwise



would not have. Trained teachers can make a living, strengthening and stabilizing their own families and communities.

Voices

“Before coming to this training I had the wish to become a president, but I thought it was only a wish and that for me becoming a president was impossible. Now, after having gone through this training, I know for sure that I can be a future president. I know and believe that nothing is impossible. Every day after the training I went home and told my parents and siblings everything I had learned that day. Attending this training has totally changed my life. As a result, I now find myself very interested in reading books and learning.”

– *Fatima Yazdani, 10th grade,
Balkh Baashtan High School*



“By attending this training, I learned that I have equal rights as men and boys in our society. No one can prevent me. Therefore, they have no right and reason to call us less intelligent. They are the ones who are deficient in intellect who killed Farkhunda, Rokhshaana, Shukria and other innocent women. I now know that I am not deficient in intellect, I am not a second-class citizen, I am not weak, I am not a

servant, I am not a sheep like some people refer to me, I am a woman. From now on, I will defend the rights of those women who are violated. Now I know I can be stronger than a man, I am one’s daughter, one’s sister, one’s wife and one’s mother. I will not take those serious who put us down, and call us names. I will not be silent anymore. I now know that I have the right to freedom of speech, I have my individual right. You cannot make me silent anymore unless you burn me like Farkhonda. You cannot imprison me in a cage you call Burqa because I am a woman, I am free. I can. I will fight until I achieve my goals.”

– *Samaana Panaahi, 10th grade, Sajadeya High School*

“From this training, I learned to keep trying and to never give up and never accept defeat. I also learned to have a goal in life and to work toward my goal. I have a friend who wants to quit school. She says what did other girls achieve by studying? So, she had decided to give up. I encouraged her to attend the Early Marriage Prevention training with me. She participated in this training and has now changed her mind about quitting school. In this training I also learned to have hope that we will succeed one day.”

– *Zahra Mohammadi, 10th grade, Sajadeya High School*

“This training has had a lot of effects on my personality. The teachers and the guest speakers have become my role models. I will use their words and experiences to succeed in life. After this, I will work on my confidence and to have courage not only in class and school but also outside

the school and to have better social relationship with my friends. This training has made me decide to help those who are in need of my help and finally and most importantly to believe in myself.”

– *Friba Sakhizada, 10th grade, Sajadeya High School*

About the Featured Grantee

Sahar was founded in 2001 by Julia Bolz, a Seattle attorney dedicated to building bridges between the U.S. and Afghanistan after 9/11. Originally called Ayni, it was first dedicated to working with school children in both nations. In 2009, seeing the need for increased access to education for girls in Afghanistan, Bolz incorporated the project into a 501(c)(3) to build schools in the country, replacing those that fell into disrepair or were destroyed during Taliban rule. The organization officially changed its name to Sahar in November 2014. The work done by Sahar’s staff members, interns and fellows is supported by thirteen members of the Board of Directors.



Over the past ten years, Sahar has partnered with the Afghanistan American Friendship Foundation (AAFF), an Afghan non-profit (NGO) legally registered with the Afghan government to implement programs. American NGOs are not permitted to operate in Afghanistan without an Afghan registered partner.

Where They Work



Ahmad Shah Durrani unified the Pashtun tribes and founded Afghanistan in 1747. The country served as a buffer between the British and Russian Empires until it won independence from national British control in 1919. A brief experiment in democracy ended in a 1973 coup and a 1978 communist countercoup. The Soviet Union invaded in 1979 to support the tottering Afghan communist regime, touching off a long and destructive war. The USSR withdrew in 1989 under relentless pressure by internationally supported anti-communist mujahidin rebels. A series of subsequent civil wars saw Kabul finally fall in 1996 to the Taliban, a hardline Pakistani-sponsored movement that emerged in 1994 to end the country's civil war and anarchy. Following the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks, a U.S., Allied, and anti-Taliban Northern Alliance military action toppled the Taliban for sheltering Osama Bin Ladin.

Despite gains toward building a stable central government, the Taliban remains a serious challenge for the Afghan Government in almost every province. The Taliban still considers itself the rightful government of Afghanistan, and it remains a capable and confident insurgent force despite its last two spiritual leaders being killed. It continues to declare that it will pursue a peace deal with Kabul only after foreign military forces depart.

Afghanistan is located in Southern Asia, north and west of Pakistan, east of Iran, encompassing an area almost six times the size of Virginia and slightly smaller than Texas. The population is 33,332,025 (July 2016 est.). There are 34 provinces in Afghanistan. Its population is made up of many different ethnic groups who speak different languages and have their own cultural practices. Some of the largest ethnic groups are, in order, Pashtuns, Tajiks, Hazaras, Uzbeks, Turkmens, Nuristani, Baloch, and Pashayi. The country is 99.7 percent Muslim – 84.7-89.7 percent Sunni, and 10-15 percent Shia.

Afghanistan has one of the youngest populations in the world. The median age in the country is 18.6 years old. Sixty-three percent of Afghanistan's population is under age 24. The mother's mean age at first birth is 19.9 years, and the fertility rate is 5.22 children born/woman (2016 est.) Literacy, as defined by those ages 15 and over who can read and write, is 38.2 percent for the total population. Of that, 52 percent are male, and 24.2 percent are female (2015 est.).



A Closer Look at Forced and Early Marriage and its Effect on Women's Opportunities

Forced and early marriages deprive young girls of realizing their potential and force them into the roles of wife and mother at a very young age. Despite Afghanistan's signing of international declarations to the contrary, forced and early marriage is a cultural practice in Afghanistan.

Poverty, strong patriarchal values, poor access to education and the low value assigned to girls in Afghan society are behind Afghanistan's high child marriage rates. Marriages are used to settle debts or to strengthen family status through social alliances. Poor families consider a daughter as an economic burden who must be married quickly to reduce the financial strain. With the ongoing conflict in Afghanistan many parents aim to marry their daughters at young ages to secure their futures.



Early marriage, especially when it leads to cutting a girl's education short, leads to serious consequences. Without the basics of an education, children don't get a fair chance in life. Education opens the doors to opportunities that can lift individuals out of poverty. On average, each additional year of education a child receives increases future earnings

by about 10 percent. Each additional year a country manages to keep its children in school can reduce that country's poverty rate by 9 percent. Poorer countries see the highest returns.

Across the world, an estimated 31 million girls of primary school age and 32 million girls of lower secondary school age were out of school in 2013. Educated women tend to be healthier, earn more income, have fewer children, and provide better health care and education to their own children, all of which can lift households out of poverty. They are less likely to marry early and against their will, and less likely to die in childbirth.

The world's population of 15-24-year-olds will increase by nearly 100 million in the next 15 years. Most of these young people will be in Asia and Africa. They will become the parents who raise tomorrow's children, the workers who keep the global economy going, and the leaders who determine the kind of world we live in. They need the skills to build a secure livelihood and participate fully in society.

Sources:

[UNICEF](#)

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[CIA World Factbook](#)

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