

POLICY BRIEF

Increasing girls' access to formal agricultural education in Afghanistan

CATALYZING THE SKILLS NEEDED FOR AGRICULTURE PRODUCTION AND FOOD SECURITY

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Executive Summary

As one of the top growth sectors in Afghanistan, agriculture is the backbone of the economy and women and girls are the backbone of agriculture, with 70 percent of rural women working directly or indirectly in the sector (AREU 2017). Even though girls learn agricultural skills informally from family and friends, they make up only 12 percent of all students in agricultural Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET). Afghan girls are trapped in a vicious cycle that limits their potential to develop their skills and use them effectively for national growth and self-reliance.

This brief offers context for understanding the barriers to girls' participation in agricultural TVET. A particularly formidable challenge, for example, is that parents, teachers, and even students themselves consider agricultural education to be second-class. Moreover, policies and practices within the Afghan education system present girls with numerous impediments to perceiving agricultural education as a viable path to a successful career.

The brief offers recommendations for ways national and international actors can cultivate awareness among students, teachers, parents, and their communities that agriculture can be a first-class educational opportunity. It also identifies ways to remove system-wide barriers, such as by improving the quality of agricultural TVET, recruiting more female teachers who can serve as role models, and creating pathways to higher degrees within TVET. Lastly, it proposes avenues through which formal agricultural TVET can map routes to successful careers for young women in the formal labor market.

The future of girls' education—and of TVET itself—has become highly uncertain since the Taliban assumed power in August 2021. While this dramatic event was beyond the scope of this study, this brief makes a call to action that, in the immediate term, we ensure that all girls can return to school—particularly to build their literacy skills to take advantage of formal technical and vocational trainings—and that they continue to receive nourishment during a national food shortage. In the longer term, my research seeks to help girls and young women in Afghanistan realize their full potential to contribute to the national economy and food production system, and provide guidance for national and international organizations seeking to support girls' participation in agricultural TVET.

Introduction

Increasing the participation of girls and young women in formal agricultural education is essential to Afghanistan's future growth and prosperity. Both international studies (Leao et al. 2018) and national policy documents, such as the National Growth Agenda (Afghanistan 2017), identify agriculture as the backbone of Afghan economic growth and incorporating women into the formal agricultural sector as essential to that growth.

With agricultural production accounting for 23 percent of Afghanistan's gross domestic product (GDP), it is no surprise that the agriculture sector dominates discussions among policymakers for its potential, particularly for reducing poverty and stimulating job creation. Agriculture accounts for 22.8 percent of self-employment and family businesses and provides 45 percent of all jobs in the country (AREU 2017). Realization of the potential of the agriculture sector could increase economic growth by 7.5 percent by 2024 (Afghanistan 2017). However, in 2021 more than half of the population was still confronted by acute hunger due to continuing conflict, the COVID-19 pandemic, an economic collapse, and a severe drought (FAO 2021). The food security crisis makes the need for a skilled agricultural workforce even more urgent.

In urban areas, informal agriculture is highly dependent on female workers, mostly unpaid (Solotaroff et al. 2011) outside the cities, an estimated 70 percent of rural women are involved—directly or indirectly—in farming, managing small orchards and vegetable gardens and tending cattle (AREU 2017).

Women's agricultural education and skills development are essential to inclusive agricultural development and would help incorporate them into the formal sector and spur national economic growth (National Strategy on Women in Agriculture 2015–20). However, girls' participation in formal agricultural education is very low (Sabri et al. 2017), resulting in thwarted aspirations and a loss of human potential. Rural women depend on agriculture and animal husbandry for their livelihoods; equipping them with relevant skills is critical to unlocking their potential and increasing agricultural production, and thus national growth.

This brief seeks to broaden our understanding of the importance of educating girls about agriculture and characterizes agriculture as a viable career pathway to the world of work. Findings are based on evidence gleaned from surveys, focus groups, and interviews of individual female agriculture students, their teachers, provincial and national TVET administrators, and TVET experts (see Appendix A for the complete methodology).

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Context

This brief provides background information about Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) in Afghanistan and a review of relevant policies¹ up to August 15, 2021, at which point field work was abruptly ended due to the fall of Kabul to the Taliban. Since that time, the education of young women and girls has been disrupted. Public statements indicate that Taliban authorities will allow girls to continue their education in some form of gender-segregated classrooms. However, to date, according to TOLONews (2021), girls have been able to attend public high schools in only eight out of the 34 provinces, while in the rest of the country public high schools remain closed for girls. Moreover, almost all international support to Afghanistan has stopped. Experts estimate, for example, that 90 percent of technical² and financial resources for TVET have been drained from the country. Teachers' salaries have gone unpaid for months now.

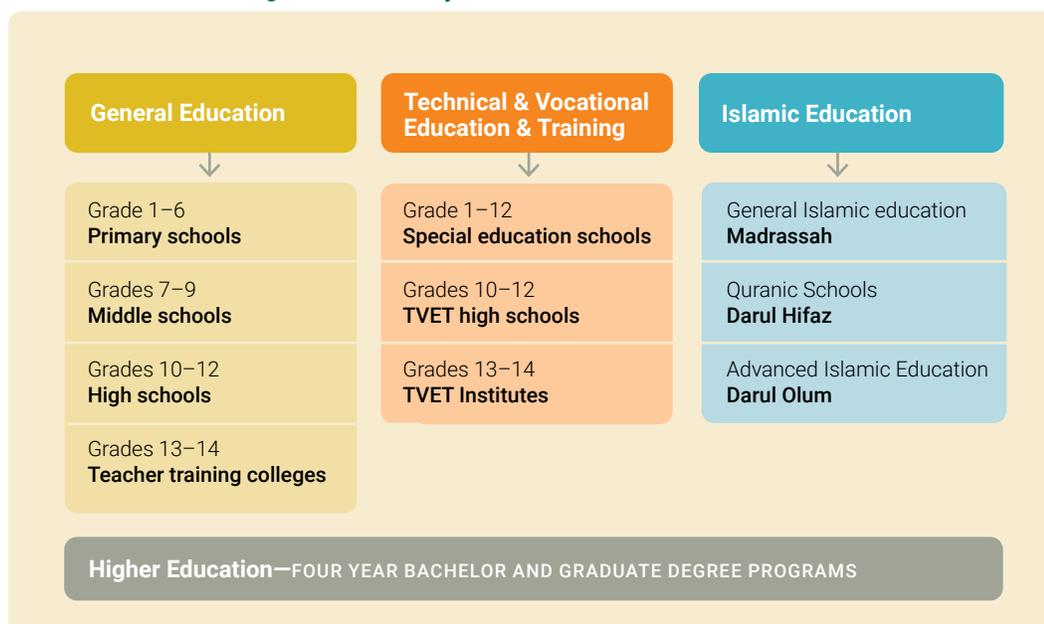
The discussion below is based on a review of government documents and data up to August 2021.

PARTICIPATION OF GIRLS IN TVET

In the past two decades, Afghanistan had made substantial gains in providing more girls access to general education. As of 2019, girls constituted about 38 percent of the student population, with their participation varying by type of education (Figure 1). As can be seen in Figure 2, agricultural TVET has the lowest rate of female participation; of the nearly 19,282 students enrolled in agriculture schools and institutes in 2019, only 2,403—less than 12 percent—were girls (TVETA, 2020).

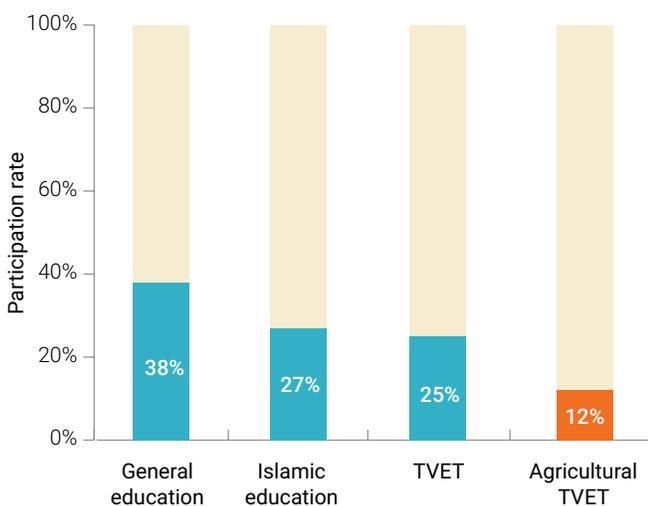
In a few major cities, the participation of girls in agricultural education³ is higher than in rural provinces. In 2019, while there were 328 girls enrolled in agricultural schools and institutes in Kabul alone, in eight rural provinces no girls were enrolled in such institutions, and in 9 of the 34 provinces, fewer than 50 girls were enrolled. Most of these institutions are in or near cities that are difficult for rural girls to reach.

FIGURE 1. Structure of Afghan education system



Sources: MoE 2019 and TVETA 2019.

FIGURE 2. Girls' participation rate in education in Afghanistan



Source: MoE 2019 and TVETA 2021.

In response to these low participation rates, the Afghan government proposed actions to address the barriers to girls seeking agricultural education. The newly autonomous Technical and Vocational Education and Training Authority (TVETA)⁴ has sought to support girls' participation by expanding TVET schools and institutes in 272 of Afghanistan's 426 districts.

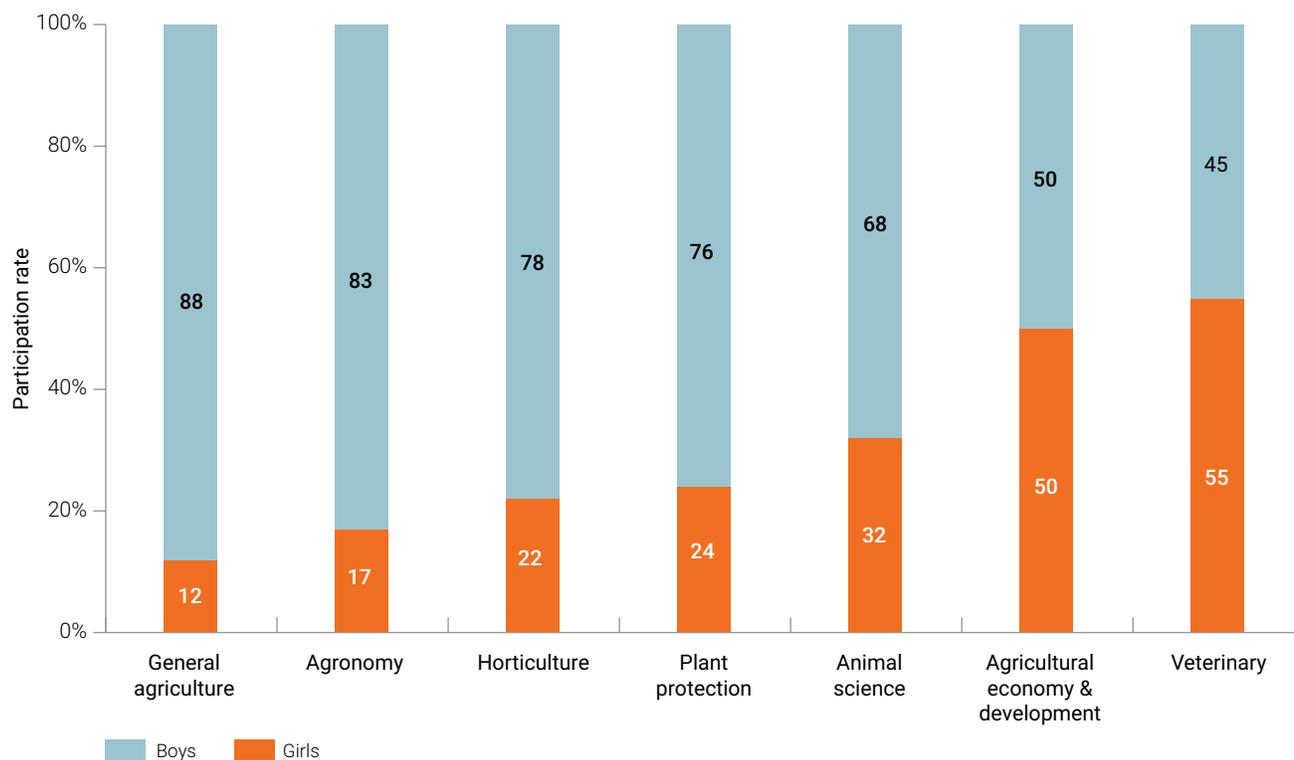
As of 2020, the TVETA operated 381 schools and institutes: 143 institutes, 202 high schools, and 18 general education schools.⁵ Of these, 139 are dedicated solely to agricultural education, and agriculture is also taught in 113 multi-trade schools and institutes. Figure 3 shows the participation rates of girls in the seven trades offered under agricultural TVET; girls' participation in all trades except agriculture economy development and veterinary is disproportionately low compared to boys.

Despite an increase in the number of TVET schools and institutes reported by the TVETA over the past five years, the lack of physical infrastructure is daunting and construction of new facilities has been limited. Since 2019, the total number of TVET schools and institutes increased from around 310 to over 381 in 2021. This increase was not due to the actual construction of physical infrastructure. Some of these new schools and institutes are housed in temporary rental houses, for example. The TVET Strategy for 2020–24 called for eight special TVET schools to be established for girls; as yet, there are none.

BARRIERS TO GIRLS' PARTICIPATION IN TVET

Previous studies have identified impediments to the participation of girls in formal agricultural education—among them are distance to TVET schools and institutes, lack of women teachers and female-only spaces, and lack of education options in trades favored by girls.

FIGURE 3. Girls' and boys' participation in agricultural TVET, by trade



Source: TVETA Data 2020.

Distance: A 2020 GIZ study of rural youth found that for nearly 60 percent of young people in rural areas, the nearest TVET school was about two hours away by foot. Given this reality, access to TVET education, including agricultural education for girls, is extremely difficult; moreover, 67 percent of students used bicycles, motorcycles, and other vehicles to get to school (GIZ 2020), but girls rarely have access to these modes of transport.

Lack of women teachers and female-only spaces: In 2015, a People in Need (PiN) study identified other critical barriers, including the lack of female teachers; female-only classrooms; parent, family, and community support; and separate sanitation facilities for teachers and students. These factors were associated with fewer girls in Agriculture Veterinary Institutes (AVI) and Agriculture High Schools (AHS). Further, in 2017 the Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit (AREU) found that the low number of female teachers and trainers in TVET remains a significant barrier to enrolling girls and women in TVET courses. A study by the National Agriculture Education College (NAEC) in 2017 noted that the low number of female students in agricultural education

Girls' participation in all trades except agriculture economy development and veterinary is disproportionately low compared to boys.

results in a lack of female teachers who could ultimately serve as role models for female students of agriculture.

Lack of trades favored by girls: A study by the Ministry of Economy in 2019 found that lack of training options in trades in which girls are primarily interested and lack of financial support for female students are also major deterrents.

While such barriers are relevant to TVET generally, a clearer understanding of what discourages girls from studying agriculture in particular might have major benefits. Only when we more clearly understand the specific challenges of girls and young women entering and advancing in agricultural TVET will we be able to craft policies to ensure that they can take full advantage of opportunities in this sector.

POLICY DIRECTION

Around the mid-2010s, the national policy debate in Afghanistan began to recognize that human capital development is central to economic growth. This discussion was led by the High Council on Education, Culture, and Human Capital. Thereafter, TVET was often included in development strategies as a means to economic growth and self-reliance.

However, the TVETA has yet to establish policies that specifically address the participation of girls, particularly in agricultural education. Figure 4 summarizes the national policy documents that recognize the importance of what women can contribute to national growth and call for the expansion of agricultural TVET programs for girls. Despite this policy direction on paper, only a few urban schools and institutes have put this commitment into practice.

FIGURE 4. National policy documents relevant to agricultural TVET, 2015–19



Source: Author's analysis of policy documents.

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Findings

Based on focus group discussions and interviews with more than 300 female agriculture students, teachers and faculty about their lived experiences, as well as TVET directors and experts, I present evidence of the challenges that confront girls and women who pursue agricultural TVET and navigate paths into the labor market. This study uncovered three main factors that inhibit the participation of girls in formal agricultural TVET: the perception in society that agriculture is a second-class education; current practices and policies of the education system that deter girls from choosing it; and the absence of viable career paths for young women who graduate from agricultural TVET.

1. SOCIAL PERCEPTIONS THAT AGRICULTURAL EDUCATION IS SECOND-CLASS

Agricultural TVET is often considered a second-class education which can dissuade girls—and their families—from pursuing this field of study. This was found to be true not only for students and their families but also for teachers, provincial TVET directors, and public officials.

Negative perceptions of students and teachers: Even among students in agricultural schools and institutes, agriculture is not their preferred course of study. Female respondents reported that they would have preferred to study such fields as medical sciences, law, or political science. As one AHS student from Dawlatabad, Balkh province, commented, *“I want to become a medical doctor in the future.”*

Of 120 AHS students in this study, only 28 showed any interest in continuing with agriculture in higher education. This could be linked to students’ expressed concerns about the quality of agricultural education or the lack of real job opportunities upon graduation (see below). Similarly, of the 120 AVI students interviewed, only 20 had made agriculture their top choice in the Kankor, the special entrance exam for higher education. Moreover,

of the 82 young women surveyed who were already studying in the agriculture faculty at Balkh University, only 12 had selected agriculture as their top choice in Kankor.

Despite currently studying agriculture, more than 85 percent of AHS students hoped to move into a different field of study after graduation from high school. This could be because there are few agricultural jobs available after graduation or because of negative social perceptions of agriculture. Indeed, 35 percent of respondents studying in AVIs reported that girls’ lack of interest in agriculture was the principal cause of the low female enrollment in agricultural schools and institutes.

Teachers’ perceptions mirror, and possibly influence, that of their students. Agricultural TVET is perceived by agriculture teachers of both genders as second-class education. As one woman teaching at an agricultural institute commented,

“When I heard that through the Kankor exam I got [accepted] to the agriculture faculty, I cried for one week. I wanted to become a doctor.”

Such negative perceptions among women teachers could negatively influence female students, eroding their commitment to completing their agricultural education

Negative perceptions of family, relatives, and society: Family and relatives were the factor most frequently mentioned as discouraging girls from pursuing education in agriculture. Among the AHS students, 32 percent said that lack of parental permission was a barrier for them, and 24 percent that their families considered agriculture an unsuitable profession for girls.

However, in some instances, women on the faculty did protect girls studying agriculture. A female professor commented that:

“Once, a man came with his daughter. He was angry and wanted his daughter to leave agriculture, saying, you want my daughter to shovel in the future. However, as female faculty members, we convinced him that his daughter could become an expert, a researcher, or a businesswoman. Then he let her study.”

Siblings were also reported as providing little support for girls in agricultural schools and institutes; less than 10 percent stated their siblings had supported their enrollment. And about 40 percent of AVI students mentioned having been pressured by relatives to *stop* studying agriculture. About 37 percent reported lack of parental permission as the underlying factor pushing girls away from pursuing agricultural education. Girls also reported that siblings and other relatives believed that general education was better. As one TVET expert commented, families discourage their girls from studying agriculture TVET because of *“concerns about overall security coupled with early-age marriages, distance from agricultural education institutions, and the perception that agricultural work is always performed under harsh conditions.”*

In both rural and urban communities, there is a perception that agriculture is more appropriate for men than women. As a woman lecturer at the NAEC commented:

“Because of our cultural perceptions of agriculture, I did not like agriculture at first. People ask how a woman can become a farmer or an animal doctor? But after grade 3 of my undergraduate studies in agriculture, I became interested and then studied with passion.”

Provincial TVET directors also highlighted the challenge of social perception as a fundamental barrier: Of the 27 TVET provincial directors, eight believed that the most important cause of the low number of girls in agricultural education is the cultural perception of agriculture as men’s work, which dissuades girls from pursuing agriculture as an educational and career path.

2. CURRENT PRACTICES AND POLICIES THAT DETER GIRLS FROM CHOOSING AGRICULTURAL TVET

Girls highlighted concerns about the quality of agricultural TVET, lack of women teachers, and lack of educational pathways as some of the critical systemic challenges that make it difficult for their own and other families to support their daughters in pursuing agricultural education.

Quality concerns: Concerns about the quality of agricultural education discouraged girls from showing interest in the field. Half of the female AVI and AHS students interviewed for this study said that improving the quality of agricultural education should be the top priority if the TVETA is to increase girls’ participation.

Lack of labs and the absence or the low quality of practical learning opportunities were specifically identified as discouraging student interest. Data from 27 provinces show that in 2021, of nearly 139 schools and institutes, mainly agricultural, only three AHSs and 12 AVIs had even small training farms. Occasionally there has been ad hoc coordination among provincial Departments of Agriculture, Irrigation, and Livestock (DAIL) and TVETA departments so that AHS and AVI students could make field trips to farms run by provincial departments of the Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation and Livestock (MAIL), but this is rare. Moreover, about 37 percent of the AVI and AHS students in this study stated they did not have access to all the textbooks and materials needed for their classes.

Quality is affected not only by the lack of textbooks, but also by curricula that does not offer the relevance desired by students. For instance, some students were interested in starting their own businesses and creating opportunities for other women. Among student comments were these:

“I would like to become a competitive businesswoman in agriculture and bring wider changes toward prosperity for our society through agriculture.”

“I would like to have a business in agriculture where I can employ about 200 women.”

“I would like to have a beekeeping business and become a good business manager.”

Teachers and experts interviewed for this study indicated that current curricula do not reflect such student aspirations and are not attuned to local needs and context. Curricula tied to the needs and expectations of girls themselves could improve their receptivity to agricultural education and nurture their chances

for self-employment or building a career in agriculture. They could also improve the image of agricultural TVET as first-class education and make it worth a student's investment of time.

Lack of women teachers: The TVETA has not recruited enough women teachers for agricultural TVET. Among AHS students, 24 percent considered the shortage of women teachers to be a critical factor in girls' lack of interest in the topic, and 42 percent stated that hiring more women teachers would encourage families to increase girls' enrollment in agricultural education.

TVETA data for 2019 shows that women teachers are relatively rare in all TVET areas but especially in agriculture (Figure 5). Moreover, the scarcity of women role models in the permanent structure demonstrates a lack of institutional commitment to girls' needs.

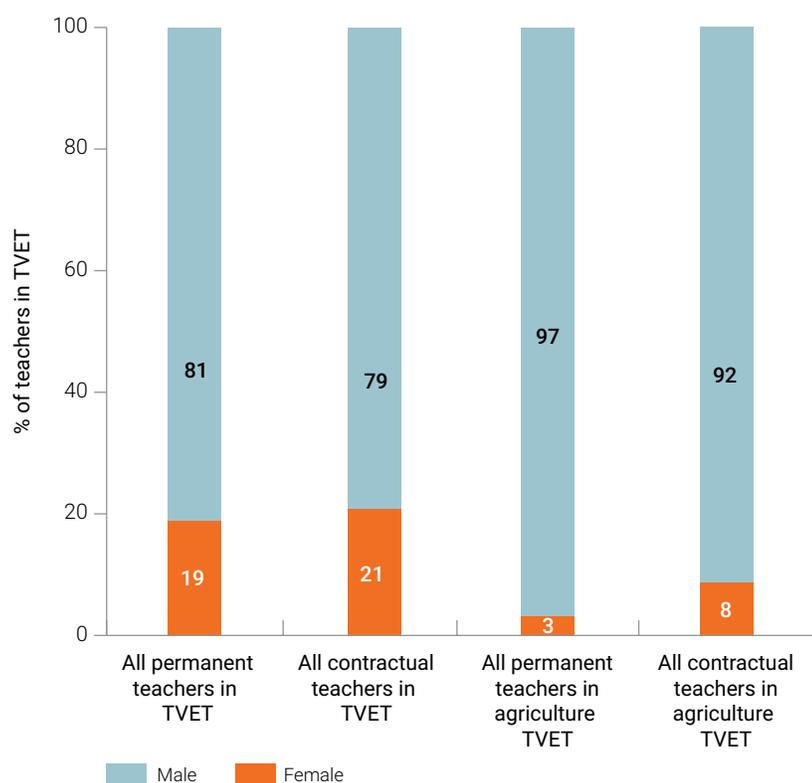
Subjecting women applicants to the same recruitment procedure as men is also disadvantageous to the former: applicants must travel from rural provinces to the capital for recruitment seminars, which can take days, discouraging applicants who have children. In addition to dealing with a lack of security, transportation costs, the cost of accommodation in Kabul, and

the length of the bureaucratic process, female teacher candidates must also contend with cultural norms that require a male relative to accompany them, which can double the costs. These are only some of the barriers that female applicants must overcome to become teachers in TVET. A recent policy by the Independent Administrative Reform and Civil Service Commission would give five additional points to women applicants, but that is too little to help them succeed in a process full of hurdles.

The lack of female teachers in agricultural TVET creates a vicious cycle: Fewer women teaching in agricultural education leads to fewer female students, which further limits the pool of female teacher candidates, and thus fewer women will serve as role models to new generations of female students.

But even when there is interest, the system makes it difficult for young women to become teachers. Nearly 87 percent of the AVI students surveyed showed interest in becoming agriculture teachers; but high school teachers must have a bachelor's degree, so that girls who graduate from AVIs⁶ are not yet qualified to become teachers, for the TVETA or anywhere else. It will clearly be difficult for Afghanistan to address the lack of female teachers if these practices and policies are not addressed.

FIGURE 5. Distribution of teachers in TVET by gender



Source: TVETA 2019.

Lack of pathways to higher education within agriculture: Our survey found that more than 90 percent of AVI students want to pursue a higher degree in applied agriculture, yet the agriculture faculties run by the Ministry of Higher Education (MoHE) are oriented more to academic education than applied agriculture. There is simply no way to earn a higher degree in applied agriculture in Afghanistan. Young women who want to continue studying are thus forced to shift their aspirations to something else—but that is not easy because they all require a bachelor's degree, which the current structure of education makes it difficult to achieve.

The system makes girls who want to take a step forward instead take a step backward. For instance, current MoHE policy requires students who achieve the required grade point average for their two years of education at an AVI to repeat the second year of study in an agriculture faculty if they want a bachelor's degree. AVI graduates thus have to study for five years instead of four if

they want to earn that degree. In addition, making the switch to an agriculture faculty requires paperwork that forces students to travel from the provinces to the capital—a policy that, like teacher applications, again affects young women disproportionately more than men.

Lack of coordination between education and agriculture institutions: The idea that general education is better than agricultural education is driven in part by the institutional politics between the MoE and the TVETA, especially at the provincial and district levels. Study participants reported, for example, that MoE administrators discourage girls from enrolling in TVET schools. In part, both the MoE and the TVETA are competing for resources: Higher enrollment brings more resources to local schools and institutes. This was reported by experts from the NAEC:

“When the TVET Authority came about, the Ministry of Education was actively discouraging people from going to TVET in general. So, there was a decline in absolute numbers.”

“Overall, general education institutions create a negative mindset among the students, and they play negative campaigns against agricultural education.”

This pattern of government institutions discouraging boys and girls from pursuing agricultural education was also reported at the provincial level. As one TVET provincial director commented: “Lack of cooperation from the Ministry of Education is the key factor in the declining number of girls in agricultural education.” This appears to be a particular problem during the transition from ninth grade to high school. Girls need to complete paperwork to transfer to agricultural high schools but may not find support to do this within the general education system. TVETA provincial directors indicate that MoE administrators often make it difficult for girls to obtain proof from the MoE that they have completed 9th grade, as is needed to register in an AHS.

3. LACK OF VIABLE CAREER PATHWAYS IN AGRICULTURE FOR FEMALE GRADUATES

Lack of agricultural employment opportunities for young women is another barrier to increasing the participation of girls in agricultural education. About 25 percent of survey respondents said that lack of jobs was a major reason family and relatives discouraged girls from pursuing agricultural education. Similarly, nearly 33 percent of provincial TVET directors believed that lack of career pathways make it hard for them to convince girls to enroll and stay in agricultural education.

Asked what the top three priorities of the TVETA should be to increase girls’ participation in agriculture, girls rated providing internships and employment opportunities the highest. Nearly 70 percent of AVI students reported that this would make their families far more likely to accept their daughters’ studying agriculture.

Once in agricultural education, female students demonstrate a strong interest in building careers in the sector, either by pursuing a bachelor’s degree and then graduate education or by becoming veterinarians, agricultural engineers, or professors of agriculture.

“Ultimately, I want to pursue a master’s degree in agriculture.”

“I would like to become a top agricultural engineer.”

“I would like to become a top animal veterinary doctor.”

“I would like to become a professor of agriculture.”

However, the public sector struggles to provide career pathways for women, producing and reproducing inequities that affect women and girls disproportionately. While the MAIL has drafted policies supporting women’s inclusion, according to a former Deputy Minister, as of August 2021 only 7 percent of its own employees were women. Clearly, government institutions are failing to provide equal opportunities for young women wanting to work in the sector. As one expert commented:

“The government and its educational institutions, including the Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation, and Livestock (MAIL), have done a poor job in promoting agriculture as a fully viable career path for the next generation of young Afghan girls.”

Beyond the public sector, one NAEC lecturer said that “fewer opportunities for TVET graduates in the labor market” decrease the participation of girls in agricultural education. He suggested that if the private sector created agricultural employment opportunities for women, it would directly affect their AHS and AVI enrollments. That would require the TVETA to build links and partnerships with the private sector.

The numerous hurdles that girls must clear to enter agriculture TVET results in low enrollment of high school girls. Those who do make it then encounter more hurdles to obtain a bachelor’s equivalent either within TVET or in higher agricultural education. Coupled with strict laws requiring a bachelor’s degree for teachers of agricultural TVET, this process prevents many young Afghan girls from realizing their aspirations.

Recommendations

This policy brief is based on research conducted in the weeks just before the fall of Kabul to the Taliban on August 15, 2021. Since that time, the future of girls' education in the country—and of TVET itself—has been uncertain. While the current policy context makes it extremely challenging to provide specific recommendations, I hope to understand how girls and young women can unlock their potential through formal agricultural TVET and provide high-level policy recommendations for national and international organizations looking to support girls' participation in agricultural TVET in Afghanistan.

Because of the high degree of uncertainty in Afghanistan, I have organized my recommendations into short term, immediate needs and more long-term actions. In the short term, Afghanistan and the international development community must ensure that the basic human rights of all students are met. Children must have food to eat, and girls must return to school—systematically—across the country. In addition, a focus on foundational literacy is required so that girls can benefit from formal technical and vocational training programs.

The key recommendations for the longer run (summarized in Figure 6) are based on a scenario⁷ in which these immediate needs are met, the current government allows girls to pursue agricultural education, and the international community continues to provide support and funding for TVET in Afghanistan. Despite the country's enormous current challenges, the recommendations assume that ultimately agricultural education for girls could be expanded to areas previously affected by conflict.

1. PROMOTE AGRICULTURE AS A FIRST-CLASS EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITY FOR GIRLS

The TVETA, with the support of national (governmental and non-governmental) and international organizations, should:

- Cultivate awareness of agricultural TVET as a means of economic opportunity for girls.
- Listen to the concerns of students, teachers, parents, and other stakeholders and apply a comprehensive strategy to present agricultural TVET as a viable education choice and critical to economic growth.
- Create a sector-wide approach starting in secondary education to cultivating *Angiza*,⁸ a strong conscious self-motivation among girls and others.
- Normalize girls' participation in agricultural education through early strategic interventions at the elementary and secondary levels through content, stories, and curricula.
- Regularly engage the community robustly, working with parents' committees and organizations for women, and facilitating site visits to women-owned farms and parent visits to schools and institutes.

FIGURE 6. Attracting more girls to agricultural TVET

Cultivate awareness • Improve quality • Hire more female teachers • Provide opportunities for higher degrees in agriculture TVET • Increase coordination among stakeholders in agriculture • Create career pathways



1. Promote agriculture as a first-class education

- Listen to the students, teachers, parents, and other relevant stakeholders.
- Cultivate awareness among students, teachers, parents, and the community at large.
- Normalize girls' participation at secondary levels through stories and curricula
- Identify benchmarks for an institutional culture of support for enrolling, retaining, and successfully graduating girls.



2. Improve the quality of agriculture TVET

- Distribute all textbooks and learning supplies to the students well in advance.
- Increase the number of learning labs and farms to all schools and institutes.
- Give separate land slots to girls for independent learning and practice.
- Customize the curricula and learning materials to the local needs and contexts.



3. Hire more female teachers

- Respond to the increasing need of female students asking for female teachers.
- Identify women in the informal economy with substantial knowledge who could serve as part-time teachers.
- Develop a separate Teacher Recruitment Guide for female teachers in agriculture TVET.



4. Provide higher degree pathways within TVET

- Allow for more and flexible pathways toward higher degrees in agriculture within the TVET system.
- Introduce applied agriculture pathways through TVET.



5. Increase coordination among stakeholders in agriculture

- Pass the National Qualification Framework with the support of the MoHE, the MoE, the MAIL, and other ministries and organizations involved in human capital development in Afghanistan to pave the way for recognition of TVET skills in the labor market.
- Establish a well-functioning mechanism to coordinate the activities of institutions involved in agriculture with those of the private sector.



6. Create career pathways into the labor market

- Provide students with internships and employment opportunities in the labor market.
- Provide graduates with jobs and career opportunities in the labor market.

- Identify benchmarks for an institutional culture of support that not only encourages girls' enrollment but also their retention and successful graduation and keeps alumni engaged.

2. IMPROVE THE QUALITY OF AGRICULTURE TVET

The TVETA, with the support of national and international organizations, should:

- Address quality concerns and strengthen agriculture as a first-class education.
- Consult young women and girls on how to improve the quality of education and support a bottom-up approach to enhancing the quality of teaching and learning.
- Add more choices within agricultural TVET that are favored by girls and customized to local needs and aspects of the agriculture environment, such as agribusiness.
- Provide practical hands-on training, internships, employment opportunities, and classes in entrepreneurship.
- Distribute all textbooks and other learning materials to students well in advance to improve their preparation for learning.
- Increase the number of learning labs and farms for all schools and institutes, where necessary in collaboration with the MAIL.
- Give separate land slots to TVET schools and institutes to accommodate freedom of learning and provide practical training opportunities.

- Encourage collaboration with both nonprofit and for-profit organizations through public-private partnership models.

3. HIRE MORE FEMALE TEACHERS

- Use a quota system to increase the number of female teachers. The current procedure for recruiting women does not recognize the reality of women graduates from faculties dominated by men. Having more female teachers will address the concerns of some parents and communities.
- Identify women in the informal economy who have substantial knowledge and could serve part-time as teachers in agricultural schools and institutes.
- Draft a Teacher Recruitment Guide for women and secure approval from the Independent Civil Service Commission to use it to recruit more female teachers of agriculture.
- Conduct capacity development programs for both women already recruited and new recruits through the NAEC, the Teachers Training Academy, and the Teachers Training Institute. Capacity development must include practical training and skills in agriculture.
- Provide specific supports to female teacher candidates to address some of the access concerns (for example, to cover travel costs, child care or other related barriers).

4. PROVIDE OPPORTUNITIES IN TVET TO EARN HIGHER DEGREES IN APPLIED AGRICULTURE

- Use the agricultural TVET system to provide higher-degree opportunities given there are so few such opportunities in higher education.

5. INCREASE COORDINATION AMONG STAKEHOLDERS IN AGRICULTURE

- Pass the National Qualification Framework with the support of the MoHE, the MoE, the MAIL, and other ministries and organizations involved in human capital development in Afghanistan to pave the way for recognition of TVET skills in the labor market.
- Establish a well-functioning mechanism to coordinate the activities of institutions involved in agriculture with those of the private sector.

6. MAP CAREER PATHWAYS FOR GIRLS INTERESTED IN AGRICULTURE

The TVETA, with the support of national and international organizations, should:

- Build employment pathways for young women into agricultural TVET.
- Provide TVET students with internship opportunities both in the public and private sectors.
- Provide TVET students and graduates with opportunities for public and private employment.
- Encourage entrepreneurial training for girls.

Finally, since the drain of technical and financial resources⁹ has stalled progress, national and international organizations must attract donors to invest in these possibilities. Teacher salaries must be paid and access to transportation increased for girls. We must promote investment in girls' potential as an investment in Afghanistan.

CONCLUSION

Despite persistent fragility, economic growth in Afghanistan requires a highly skilled, educated, and agile workforce. Since agriculture is considered one of the top growth sectors, developing the technical and professional skills of girls and women could catalyze economic growth. This calls for a cross-sector approach that recognizes the importance to agriculture of skilled female workers. Policies need to address the negative perceptions of students, their families, teachers, and society and make agriculture recognized as a viable career for women and girls. This will require creative thinking to improve the quality of agricultural TVET, increase the number of female teachers, and remove system-wide barriers to girls' participation. Agricultural TVET should also equip young women to streamline their career paths and entry into the labor market. Finally, the international community must amplify investments in the significant potential of Afghan girls to cultivate a skillful future for the growth and prosperity of Afghanistan.

APPENDIX A

Methodology

To identify ways to increase girls' participation in agricultural education, we gathered evidence on three questions to better understand why so few girls enroll in agricultural TVET.

- What factors currently support girls' participation in agricultural education?
- What factors currently inhibit girls' participation in agricultural education?
- How could future policies address the barriers to girls' participation?

Preliminary data were collected from about 150 female students and teachers in Balkh province at an AHS, an AVI, and the Agriculture Faculty of Balkh University. The province was relatively safe, and housed an AVI with considerable physical infrastructure and a higher than usual number of female agriculture teachers. The AVI is in a semi-urban area and draws girls from both urban and rural areas.

After preliminary data collection and identification of general themes among students, teachers, and policymakers, a comprehensive survey questionnaire was designed and applied in interviews with 120 female AHS students, 120 female AVI students, and 27 provincial TVET directors; five focus groups with female teachers of agriculture, and seven interviews with individual public officials and TVET experts. The respondents were drawn from across the country and represented both rural areas and cities.

To best capture the voices of girls, two female AVI students were recruited to conduct the survey with young women and girls, which successfully responded to cultural norms related to gender..

Due to COVID-19 restrictions in educational institutions, along with the insecurity prevailing in Afghanistan, most comprehensive data were collected by mobile phone, email, and online, with preliminary data collection and three focus groups were conducted in person.

TABLE A.1: Experts interviewed

NO	POSITION	INSTITUTIONAL AFFILIATION
1	Chief of Party	Catalyzing Afghan Agriculture Innovation (CAAI) project
2	Director	National Agriculture Education College (NAEC)
3	Head of Programs	Promotion of TVET in Afghanistan (GIZ)
4	Deputy Minister	Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation and Livestock (MAIL)
5	Director of Planning	TVET Authority
6	EDU2FEM project manager	NAEC
7	Director of Partnership with the Private Sector	TVET Authority

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Note: Some of the data and documents used from the TVET Authority and the Ministry of Education are not publicly available. As a senior policy specialist with the TVET Authority, I had access to those sources. Some of the websites with publicly available data have been shut down since August 2021.



Founder of the nonprofit organization Hode—“a resilient decision”—dedicated to promoting girls’ education in rural areas, **Nangyalai Attal** served as senior policy specialist at the Technical and Vocational Education and Training Authority (TVET-A) of Afghanistan from 2019 to 2021. Nangyalai received international recognition in 2014 when the UN Envoy for Global Education awarded him the UN Youth Courage Award. As an educator, he served as a lecturer at the Dunya University of Afghanistan and at the National Institute of Management and Administration (NIMA). He received a Fulbright Fellowship and has an M.S. in Human Resources from Golden Gate University in San Francisco. Mr. Attal is completing his Ph.D. in International Education at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst.

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