

EMPOWERING AFGHAN WOMEN AND ENERGIZING ECONOMIES

Afghanistan is facing a severe electricity shortage, a crisis that stifles economic growth and leaves millions without basic power. Compounding this issue, the country is highly vulnerable to the devastating effects of climate change, with recurring droughts and extreme weather patterns further straining its already fragile infrastructure.



Amid these challenges, Afghan women face significant social barriers, compounded by numerous decrees restricting their mobility. For many, the desperate need for survival forces them to turn to entrepreneurship as the only means of securing a basic livelihood in an otherwise deeply restricted context. Yet, most women have to operate in women-only markets, separate from men's businesses.

Despite these constraints, female entrepreneurs in Bamyan Province are finding ways to carve out space for their financial independence.

As part of UN Women Afghanistan's Women's Economic Empowerment Programme, the Yakawlang Female Entrepreneurs Market Solar Project has brought electricity to 35 women-owned businesses in Yakawlang-1 District through a 30 kW off-grid solar photovoltaic (PV) system that generates over 58,000 kWh of clean energy annually. The Yakawlang Female Entrepreneurs Market is an exclusive space dedicated to women, featuring businesses owned and operated solely by female entrepreneurs and catering exclusively to a women-only clientele.

The solar project significantly reduces electricity costs, saving approximately USD 87,500 annually and providing significant financial relief to a total of 462 people, including the supported women and their families.

Among them is Rahima Safdari, a 45-year-old entrepreneur and the only breadwinner for her family of eight, who acquired solar-powered sewing and zig-zag machines, enabling her to expand and modernize her handicraft business through this project.

"My business is growing, I have good revenue, and I can now involve other women in my work," says Safdari. "The electricity has increased women's employment in our district and helped save more families from poverty."

WOMEN'S ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT IN AFGHANISTAN

In the current context of Afghanistan, Women's Economic Empowerment is essential to strengthening their protection, security, and independence, serving as a foundation for broader women's empowerment efforts. UN Women adopts a twin-track approach.



WOMEN'S ENTREPRENEURSHIP

UN Women empowers vulnerable women and women-led enterprises, including MSMEs and agri-businesses, by providing access to finance, skills, assets, and markets. This includes facilitating women-only market spaces to ensure the sustainability of these businesses.



WOMEN'S EMPLOYMENT

In partnership with the private sector, UN Women delivers skills development, job readiness training, apprenticeships, and employment opportunities for women.



Photo: UN Women Afghanistan, Bamyan sub-office/ Asadullah Azami

The solar system provided to women entrepreneurs in the Yakawlang Female Entrepreneurs Market.

The solar installation allows women entrepreneurs to power energy-efficient devices, such as ironing machines, sewing machines, lighting systems and other portable electrical equipment. These technological advancements have boosted production efficiency, reduced labour costs and enhanced the shopping environment. Brighter, more inviting spaces, have increased the customer visits, benefiting both entrepreneurs and their customers.

In a bid to ensure the system’s long-term sustainability, the project also established a women-owned and women-managed savings group. This initiative enables participants to pool small contributions from their business revenues to fund future maintenance of the solar system. The women independently developed and agreed upon the group’s management framework and regulations, reinforcing their leadership and fostering community-driven sustainability.

The savings on electricity costs allowed Safdari to repay a bank loan and create job opportunities for seven other women in her community. Access to electricity also gave Safdari access to the Internet, where she found inspiration for new product designs.

The project has empowered the 35 women entrepreneurs to leverage digital platforms for marketing and learning. Through social media, women entrepreneurs are connecting with customers, exploring innovative designs on platforms, and broadening their networks internationally. Despite the restrictions imposed by the de facto authorities, these women entrepreneurs continue to engage in online learning and business activities, demonstrating extraordinary resilience and determination.

As a result of the project, these 35 women-owned businesses now generate over USD 150,000 in annual revenue, with USD 120,000 directly attributable to project support through reduced production costs and increased sales. The integration of solar-powered machinery has also improved production efficiency, cutting labour time by an estimated 2.5 hours per product, while reducing 22 tons of carbon dioxide (CO2) emissions annually.

With the solar system installed in March 2024 and ongoing capacity-development support until December 2024, this 10-month project has paved new pathways for Afghan women to achieve sustainable growth, highlighting how economic development, climate resilience and women’s empowerment can be realized in a cohesive and integrated way.



INITIATIVE RESULTS TO DATE

35 WOMEN-OWNED BUSINESSES SUPPORTED

462 PEOPLE BENEFITED

US \$ 150,000 IN ANNUAL REVENUE

REDUCTION OF 22 TONS OF CO2 EMISSIONS ANNUALLY



ABOUT UN WOMEN AFGHANISTAN

UN Women, operational in Afghanistan since 2002, is dedicated to promoting gender equality and empowering Afghan women across the nation. Through five main programme areas, UN Women Afghanistan works closely with national women’s organizations to ensure critical support to women and girls, to amplify their voices and preserve space for them amidst one of the world’s worst gender crises.

CONTACT INFORMATION

Ms. Qing Wang, Programme Specialist, Women’s Economic Empowerment, UN Women Afghanistan
qing.wang@unwomen.org

Mr. Asadullah Azami, Programme Analyst, Bamyan sub-office, UN Women Afghanistan
asadullah.azami@unwomen.org