

HEFORSHE AFGHANISTAN

CAMPAIGN BRIEF



HeForShe

Gender inequality is one of the most persistent human rights violations of our time. Although much has been achieved by the feminist movements and women's rights organisations, inequalities based on gender identities persist.

UN Women's HeForShe campaign invites people around the world to stand together to create a bold, visible force for gender equality. This starts by taking action right now to create a gender equal world.

Women's empowerment is essential for a stable society, inclusive economic growth, social cohesion, social justice, and environmental balance, as well as for progress in all spheres of life. Making gender equality a reality, therefore, is a global priority and it relies on the actions and support of all women, men, boys and girls.

HeForShe has signed up fathers who want to raise empowered daughters; leaders who know their societies will be stronger when there are as many women in business and politics as there are men.

UN Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon

UN Women's HeForShe campaign is a global solidarity movement. It sees every man and boy as a potential catalyst for change, encouraging them to speak out and take action against inequalities and discrimination faced by women and girls; playing their part in making gender equality a reality for all.

The campaign was launched globally in September 2014. Since then, more than 1.3 billion men and boys from around the world have signed on, making a commitment to set an example, change their own behaviour, and act as advocates for, and alongside, women and girls.

KEY MESSAGES

- When women are empowered, the whole of humanity benefits; socially, economically and politically. Gender equality not only liberates women from prescribed social roles and gender stereotypes, but also helps create more positive social roles based on the principles of equality.
- The Afghanistan local slogan "A Brave Man Stands for Women" underscores the courage required for a man to overcome his own prejudices and society's misconceptions, and openly renounce harmful customs that make women vulnerable. It also signals respect for men who stand up for women's rights.
- The campaign officially launched in Kabul, Afghanistan on 16 June 2015 and more than 2,400 people – 67% of them men – have participated in events held in nine other provinces, as well as four universities and one high school.
- Men and women sharing their own experiences is an important element in challenging existing attitudes and social norms, as well as encouraging individual men and boys to question their own prejudices.

KEY DONORS: The governments of Belgium, Iceland, Norway and Sweden.



"I HAVE SIX DAUGHTERS, TWO OF WHOM STUDY AT UNIVERSITY AND FOUR AT SCHOOL. I AM COMMITTED TO GIRLS' EDUCATION AND THIS HAD STARTED FROM MY OWN FAMILY."

Ameer Mohammad Dara Noori, tribal elder from Nangahar province.

"I PREFERRED THE TWO BACHELOR DEGREES THAT MY TWO SISTERS WOULD GET TO ONE MASTERS DEGREE THAT I WOULD EARN."

Namatullah Sultani, graduate of Gawharshad Institute of Higher Education, Kabul.

ENGAGING MEN AND BOYS IN AFGHANISTAN

In Afghanistan discrimination against women is entrenched at all levels of society, from the family to the highest political institutions. While sustained efforts are gaining momentum and the Afghan Constitution guarantees women's rights, Afghan women continue to face serious challenges in claiming their rights.

Despite the considerable progress made on women's rights, women in Afghanistan face persistent discrimination, violence, street harassment, forced and child marriage, severe restrictions on working and studying outside the home, and limited access to justice. This is all framed within traditional attitudes and harmful practices, and further compounded by years of war and insecurity. The only way real and lasting change can succeed is if men and women stand together in solidarity.

The HeForShe campaign in Afghanistan looks to spark honest discussion and dialogue in Afghan society, particularly among Afghan men and boys, about the issues Afghan women face, the causes and consequences, and the actions men and boys can take in their own lives to support gender equality. Those discussions can help shift attitudes towards women and their roles in society, and galvanise action at the family and community levels, in institutions and government to ultimately create lasting change for women in Afghanistan.

In its first year, the HeforShe campaign in Afghanistan has reached out to more than 2,400 people – both women and men – from different sectors, including government, the international community, civil society, cultural figures, religious leaders, and students. This has been achieved through a series of events, including the June 2015 launch in Kabul.

As part of the first phase of implementation, UN Women has partnered with Khat Media to take the campaign to 10 provinces, and four universities and one high school in Kabul.

As of May 2016, 785 men from Afghanistan have officially signed up to the HeForShe campaign, making a public commitment towards achieving gender equality; almost 600 of them have done so through the events held across the country.

To help ensure that the launches form a foundation for further progress beyond the individual events, UN Women facilitated the formation of organising committees at the four universities. This gave the students a sense of ownership over the event and the cause, encouraging ongoing activities.

IN MY OWN WORDS: NAJLLA HABIBYAR

"I have experienced immense challenges in life as a woman ... But it was in casual conversations with my father that I realised that I, too, can exist and be successful. He always gave me hope and strength. The first time I felt I could do anything I wanted, just like men, was when my father asked me what I wanted to do in life after I graduated high school. My father told me that I had the freedom to choose.

It was only when I went to work outside the house that I realised that I was a woman and I did not enjoy the privileges that men had. I faced criticism and received threats that I should not work. But my father always reminded me that working outside the house was my right and I should claim it."

Najlla Habibyar is the former CEO of the Export Promotion Agency of Afghanistan and spoke at the Kabul University launch of HeForShe.



A BRAVE MAN STANDS FOR WOMEN

As the bearer of her family's honour, an Afghan woman has to endure severe restrictions and sacrifices as she is deprived of both choice and opportunities. Harmful traditional practices mean women are both valuable and vulnerable within the family.

The local slogan for HeForShe in Afghanistan, "A Brave Man Stands for Women", was chosen specifically to acknowledge the challenge in surmounting those ingrained, discriminatory attitudes. It underscores the courage required for a man to overcome his own prejudices and society's misconceptions, and openly renounce harmful customs that make women vulnerable. Furthermore, it denotes respect and homage for men who stand up for women's rights, rather than those who hold women back or abuse them.

It means that men who stand up for women are well received and respected, and stand above those who dominate women.



"A lot of times the struggle for gender equality starts from within our own families. It starts when we begin to ask ourselves: 'does my sister have all the same privileges, let alone rights, that I do?' If you want to stand up for women's rights, the first thing that you have to do is stop minimising the harassment and suffering that women go through in this country every single day."

*Ahmad Shuja, Human Rights Watch
American University of Afghanistan event*

SHARING STORIES OF CHANGE

An important element in challenging existing attitudes and social norms, as well as encouraging individual men and boys to question their own prejudices, is for men and women from a range of backgrounds to share their own experiences.

As such, these stories have formed the backbone of the HeForShe campaign in Afghanistan.

It may seem like a simple step, however, it takes an enormous amount of courage and illustrates the very real benefits of gender equality. Even at events where there was more resistance towards the campaign's messages, the stories shared by invited speakers grabbed the audience's attention. The more personal the story, the more attention the audience members paid; silencing snickers and comments, and stopping fidgeting.

Furthermore, male volunteers gave voice to even more stories when they answered a call to come on stage and read a question and answer contained in an envelope.

These types of stories allow listeners to imagine themselves behaving in a similar way, and provides those with entrenched resistance with examples of other attitudes and behaviours that are available to them. It encourages others to share their own stories, whether publicly or within their own families and communities. Together these stories and the people who share them create a powerful ripple effect that can create further change.

"THE BEST AMONG
YOU ARE THOSE WHO
TREAT WOMEN WELL. I
TREAT WOMEN WELL."

*El-haj Ezatullah Mudaqeq
quotes the Prophet while
speaking at the Kandahar
event.*

"A SOCIETY WITHOUT
THE ACTIVE
PARTICIPATION OF ITS
FEMALE POPULATION
IS LIKE A BIRD WITH
ONE WING. IT IS
OBVIOUS THAT A BIRD
CANNOT FLY WITH ONE
WING ALONE. IT NEEDS
TWO."

*Anisa Omrani, Director
of Women's Affairs in
Nangarhar.*



"YOU ARE BRAVE
WHEN YOU STAND
NEXT TO YOUR SISTERS
AND FIGHT WITH YOUR
FAMILY FOR THEIR
RIGHTS TO GO TO
SCHOOL. SO THAT
YOUR SISTERS
STUDY LIKE YOU. SO
THAT YOUR SISTERS
PARTICIPATE IN THE
SOCIETY LIKE YOU. AND
YOU ACT LIKE FRIENDS
WITH YOUR SISTERS."

*Nadera Geya, Director of
Women's Affairs, Parwan*

COURAGE FOR FAMILY & HUMANITY

Juma Ahmadi's family in Ghazni had very conservative ideas and were very strict when it came to their ideas on gender. If his father didn't like the way his sisters dressed he would beat them, a scene that traumatised the young Juma.



After witnessing the violence his eldest sister experienced at the hands of her husband when she was married young and against her will, Juma resolved to stand up for his two younger sisters.

When he got the call to say his younger sister was also engaged, he reasoned, pleaded and finally begged his father to allow the two girls to finish their schooling – something he explained was of benefit not only to the girls themselves, but also to his wider family.

When his father finally agreed, Juma then asked that they be able to live with him in Kabul so they could attend better quality schools.

A teacher earning less than \$300 a month, he spent his entire income to support the three of them and today, both his sisters have graduated high school, can speak German and English, and are active members of youth organisations in their area. Neither of them are married.

"Now it feels like a competition," Jamu jokes. "My relatives want their daughters to outperform others and become like my sisters."



TAKING ACTION TO SUPPORT EQUAL RIGHTS AT HOME AND BEYOND

When Jafar Tawakoli married his wife she had no education, however, he encouraged her to continue her education and today "she speaks better English than me". It is just one example of his consistent activism at family and community levels to promote women's rights.

Jafar is a prominent Shiite religious leader in Herat, and calls himself a civil and religious activist. He and his wife have three daughters, and traditionally a man with no sons is encouraged to marry a second wife to increase their chances of having a male heir. Jafar, however, sees no difference between his daughters and having sons, and remains committed to his wife.



In Herat women were previously not allowed to attend prayers in the mosques, however, after advocacy from Jafar and other religious leaders, women can now attend Friday prayers.

After being asked too many times to officiate weddings between 65-year-old men and 15-year-old girls Jafar took the decision to stop officiating marriages and performing the khutba-tun-nikah sermon.

"In Islam, marriage is a contract that the bride and groom must both agree to but these girls were silent and scared, and often cried. Even when their parents insisted, I refused. It shows that the interpretation of Islamic roles needs to be updated to fit modern times."

CAPTIONS

Page 1: Male participants at the Balkh launch signing on to HeForShe.

Page 2: Top: Tribal elder Ameer Mohammad Dara Noori addresses the audience at the Nangahar launch event. Bottom: Najla Habibyar addressing the Kabul University event.

Page 3: Left: Ahmad Shuja addresses the HeForShe official launch. Right: Audience members at the Herat launch event.

Page 4: Top left: Juma Ahmadi speaking at the Dunya University and Peshgam Institute of Higher Education event. Bottom left: Male participants at the official HeForShe launch event make a commitment to gender equality. Right: Audience members at the American University of Afghanistan event.

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United Nations Entity for Gender Equality
and the Empowerment of Women

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