

PERSPECTIVAS DE DESENVOLVIMENTO DAS MULHERES NO AFGANISTÃO E EM PAÍSES VIZINHOS, COM UMA BREVE REVISÃO DOS PAÍSES ISLÂMICOS E DO SUL DA ÁSIA¹

WOMEN'S PERSPECTIVES DEVELOPMENT IN AFGHANISTAN AND NEIGHBOURING COUNTRIES WITH A BRIEF REVIEW OF SOUTH ASIAN AND ISLAMIC COUNTRIES

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Resumo: Este artigo investiga as perspectivas de desenvolvimento das mulheres no Afeganistão em comparação com os países vizinhos, e apresenta breves revisões da literatura sobre a situação das mulheres em países islâmicos e do Sul da Ásia. Análises comparativas entre vizinhos do Afeganistão (como Irão, Paquistão, China, Tajiquistão, Turquemenistão e Uzbequistão) e países do Sul da Ásia (Paquistão, Índia, Bangladesh, Maldivas, Sri Lanka, Nepal e Butão) mostram enormes disparidades de gênero. O desenvolvimento relacionado ao gênero se baseia em alguns indicadores do Índice de Desenvolvimento Humano (IDH) e do Índice de Desigualdade de Gênero (GII). A primeira dimensão analisada foi a saúde e a segunda foi o empoderamento feminino. Conclui-se, segundo indicadores do GII, que a taxa de mortalidade materna e a taxa de natalidade adolescente são mais elevadas no Afeganistão e apenas 19 por cento das mulheres estavam envolvidas no setor agrícola nos países do Sul da Ásia.

Palavras-chave: Desenvolvimento Humano. Desenvolvimento de Gênero. GII. Afeganistão. Sul da Ásia

Abstract: This article investigates the development prospects of women in Afghanistan compared to neighbouring countries, as well as presenting brief reviews of the literature on the status of women in Islamic countries and South Asian Countries. Comparative analysis between countries neighbouring Afghanistan (such as Iran, Pakistan, China, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan) and countries in South Asia (Pakistan, India, Bangladesh, Maldives, Sri Lanka, Nepal, and Bhutan) show huge gender disparities. Gender-related development is based on some indicators from the Human Development Index (HDI) and Gender Inequality Index (GII). The first dimension analysed was health and the second was female empowerment, through the combination of two other elements: the ratio of parliamentary seats occupied by women. It is concluded, according to GII indicators, that the maternal mortality rate and the teenage birth rate are higher in Afghanistan than other neighbouring countries and only 19 percent of women were involved in the agricultural sector in South Asian Countries.

Key -words: Human Development. Gender Development. Gender Inequality. Afghanistan. South Asian.

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Introduction

Gender inequality remains a global issue, which results in the fundamental rights and opportunities for women and girls. Achieving gender equality and promoting the empowerment of women and girls necessitates further advocacy to challenge widely entrenched gender-based discrimination rooted in patriarchal attitudes and societal norms (Report of the UN Secretary-General, 2017).

Since 1947, the United States has been hosting the world's most important intergovernmental commission dedicated exclusively to the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of women. It creates proposals to the Economic and Social Council on advancing women's rights in political, economic, social, and educational domains (Castillejos-Aragón, 2021).

Gender-Related Development Index (GDI) and Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM) emerged in 1995, to take into account gender inequality. The GDI measures achievements in identical dimensions and variables that take into account inequality in achievements between women and men. Both GDI and GEM have been used by way of women activists, civil societies, and feminists, being also used in the Fourth World Conference of Girls, in Beijing, in 1995.

For the construction of the gender-related development index, using the UNDP methodology of the gender development index, equal weighting was given to the health, education, and income variables. The GDI measures gender inequalities in achievement in three basic dimensions of human development: health, education, and command over economic resources. The GDI has been estimated for 166 countries in the world.

Moghadam (1999) analyses the impact of globalisation on women's labour force participation and women's mobilisation. The results of the study show that globalisation contributes to women's empowerment. Meyer (2003) investigates the impact of economic globalisation on work-related gender differences and inequalities. The results of this study illustrate that economic globalisation reduces occupational gender discrimination and inequality.

Moreover, trade liberalisation increases job opportunities for both men and women, which reduces gender inequality.

Duflo (2012) has done research with the title of Women Empowerment and found that there is a mutual relationship between economic development and women's empowerment, conceptualised as improving women's ability to access the elements of development, in particular health, education, income, rights, and political participation. In addition, he recommended policy-makers to focus on one or the other of these two relationships.

According to the 2019 Asia Foundation report on perceived gender challenges, women faced greater obstacles than men face, in various indicators, including access to education, access to rights/participation, violence, and economic concerns (Albrecht, Rude & Stitteneder, 2022).

Afghanistan is one of the latest developed countries located in South Asia. In some articles, it is named the earth of Asia. Afghanistan is a landlocked country that is surrounded by six other countries: from the North, it shares a border with Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, and Tajikistan, from the South and East it has a border with Pakistan, from the West it has a border with Iran and China, located to the Northeast of Afghanistan. It plays a vital role in the aspect of a transaction between Central Asia and South Asia.

One can see huge disparities in gender development between Afghanistan and its six neighbouring countries, some are located in the High Human Development and Gender Development group, some are in the medium group, and some are in the Low Human Development group. This study intends to delve into this issue.

1. Women in Afghanistan's Neighbouring Countries

Economically, a woman or group who establishes, manages, and runs a business might be called an entrepreneur. Women held a percentage of the employment created by the business. Due to push and pull elements that support women having independent careers and standing on their own two feet, women entrepreneurs are involved in the business. This recommendation is driven by a desire to make independent decisions about their lives and careers. Women who are burdened with home duties and household ties desire independence. In industrialised nations,

contrary to developing nations, women's entrepreneurship is expanding more quickly (Prabhakar, 2011).

Now that women are more aware of their rights and obligations, they are on par with men, regarding status. Women entrepreneurs have emerged as a powerful force in today's corporate environment. Not only are they able to balance motherhood and business, but they also make up nearly half of all companies today. Due to their previous jobs in other fields, many female entrepreneurs are between the ages of 40 and 60. Instead of seeking financial gain, their main objectives are involved in the community and personal fulfilment. Many of them are educated and form groups to share resources and business ideas (Mohiuddin, 2016).

China has frequently been recognised as a role model for gender equality in women's businesses and entrepreneurship in recent decades. Compared to many other nations, China's government and private sector have taken a more aggressive approach to encouraging women's entrepreneurship. China seems to realise the practical benefits of gender equality and women's empowerment and supporting women's career opportunities. Leadership is not only ethically right, but also a wise choice for the country's future economic success (Au, 2017).

According to a survey conducted by the University of North Carolina's Research Centre for Asia and the Pacific, the proportion of all Iranian women who are economically active has increased from 6.1 percent, in 1986, to 13.7 percent in 2000. Iran's female population now occupies more than 60% of the university's capacity. Iranian women have a lower rate of economic participation than men have.

Meanwhile, Iran ranks 46 out of the 50 least developed nations for women's employment, with a rate of only 16.8% for women during the same period (65.4 percent for males and 65.4 percent for women). Studies on Iranian women business owners have shown that these women have conquered all limitations and obstacles to their entrepreneurial aspirations. Families, the government, businesses, institutions, and companies can all play a significant role in promoting and developing entrepreneurship (Mehrgan-Sethi, 2012).

However, starting a business in Tajikistan is challenging: the remote geographic position affects all entrepreneurs, in addition to lack of a seaport, shortage of fertile land, pervasive poverty, and regional economic instability. In contrast to men, women frequently have conceptual

bases and particular obstacles. Families with female entrepreneurs tend to be more resilient to financial stress and less likely to fall into poverty. The Aid for Trade project aims to identify the challenges women encounter in entrepreneurship to improve women's participation in the private sector. The project collaborated with regional NGOs to collect data, analyse findings, and provide workable solutions to remove barriers for female entrepreneurs (United Nations Development Programme, 2016).

Most women in Turkmenistan, one of the world's oldest nations, are only allowed to play the traditional roles of mother and housewife. Few Turkmen women are aware of the fast-shifting position of women elsewhere since their country is inaccessible. Women wear the burqa as mandated by strict Islamists, in several regions close to Turkmenistan's borders with Afghanistan and Iran. Shortly, it is doubtful that the position of women in Turkmenistan will change, because the country is still relatively separate from the rest of the globe despite globalisation (Nazar, 2000).

In Uzbekistan, the percentage of women in the Liberal Democratic Party of Uzbekistan has increased from 35 to 38 percent; in the Democratic Party “Milly Tiklanish”, it has increased from 40 to 46 percent; in the People's Democratic Party, it has increased from 41 to 56 percent; and, in the Social Democratic Party “Adolat”, it has increased from 38 to 49 percent, according to the Women's Committee of Uzbekistan. The position of women in the country's social and economic life is increasing as a result. For instance, in the employment structure over the past few years, the percentage of the attractive half of society has gone up from 44 to 45.7 percent. More and more female entrepreneurs are starting firms and finding great success. (Ibrahim, 2013).

Before Taliban took back power in 2021, Afghan women who worked in business and entrepreneurship were mostly small or micro businesses requiring much help from the government and the international community. The main challenge for female entrepreneurs in Afghanistan was, at first, conservative behaviours, which make it difficult for a woman to function and make decisions independently of her husband or father. This can be especially important when starting and running a business or enterprise if the woman were socially constructed as autonomous. Secondly, in Afghan society, interacting with males in the

bureaucracy and other required sectors at all levels - participating in what a male preserve is - still now is not deemed *Wajib* (according to the Islamic Code).

From a subjective and practical standpoint, there are high degrees of insecurity, corruption, inability to capitalise on successes, and fault lines between women's productive and reproductive work (Awad, 2012). However, the productivity and economic contribution of women are influenced by cultural norms and by the level of development of the respective nation (Sajjad et al., 2020).

Female entrepreneurs greatly aid the development of wealth and employment. Large manufacturers in the industrialised world are continually “downsizing” by reorganising and firing employees in response to international competition. The ensuing uncertainties are extremely worrying from a political, social, and economic standpoint (Coughlin & Thomas, 2002).

2. Women in Islamic Countries

Bahraini women have made significant progress in recent years at all levels, which is a remarkable achievement and a cause for celebration. They can overcome more challenging obstacles if given the opportunity, due to their potential and enthusiasm. Shelash (1985), in this sense, concludes that the responsibility for the greater or lesser development of female enterprises lies with society, and not with Islamic teachings themselves. Kuwaiti women, for example, played a passive role in the country's pre-oil era, as Kuwaiti culture expects women to be meek and docile, with only the duties of mother, wife, daughter, and sister (Beck & Keddie, 1997).

Omani women can work in various economic sectors. But, their involvement is constrained and does not reach 12% of all effective institutions. In Arab states, 28% of women participate in the workforce (Nayeem, 2010). The Omani Women's Association (OWA), a non-profit group founded in 1970, has made a significant contribution to the advancement of women in the Sultanate. The OWA is expected to play a significant role in creating a network for working Omani women (Al-Lamki, 1999) or running their businesses. It is the Oman's first women's organisation with the primary objective of assisting women in obtaining suitable employment by providing high-quality training and education.

In Qatar, a key objective of the country's National Development Strategy, for 2011-2016, was to increase the number of women in the work-force and give them the resources they need to start their businesses and, hence, help the country to grow economically in a sustainable way. Additionally, the success of female entrepreneurs increases the number of women working. It holds higher-level positions, which benefits all women. However, women represent Qatar's fastest-growing segment of the labour force and have the potential to make a substantial present-day and long-term contribution to the expansion of the country's economy. Their labour force participation rate increased from 14% in 1986 to nearly 40% in 2003 (Planning Council, 2005).

There are many creative women business owners in Saudi Arabia too (Kelley et al., 2010). There are variations for support given to female entrepreneurs within each nation. In Jeddah, for instance, Alturki and Braswell (2010) found that more than half of the almost 300 businesswomen polled registered their businesses themselves, compared to one-third in Riyadh and one-fifth in the Eastern Province. Jeddah was deemed to be the friendliest city for women entrepreneurs. Emirate business women in the UAE are successful because of the help they receive from their families, the government, non-profit organisations, and other women's organisations. In general, a family's support, especially a husband's support, significantly influences a woman entrepreneur's efforts to accomplish her goals (Naser et al., 2009). The UAE government has recently heavily pushed small and medium-sized businesses.

3. Women in South Asian Countries

Women's economic participation in South Asia (which is close to replacement fertility) is expected to increase significantly, between 2005 and 2050, due to a decrease in family size, combined with their increasing employment share and state capacity to invest more in infrastructure, knowledge, skills, and technological progress. Historically, South Asia's gender-related development index in female education, health, civic participation, income-generating activities, and similar indicators of gender equality is very low. The gender development index position in South Asia is 0.801; slightly above Arab countries, 0.849, and Sub-Saharan Africa, 0.872 (Ganesh, 2017).

Despite great progress in several areas during the 2000s, gender disparities in several South Asian countries have not yet been eliminated. In South Asia, adult women's labour force participation (LFP) declined by 3.7 percentage points between 2002 and 2012. The reduction in the female economic participation rate (EPR) “far exceeded the similar decline in men (3.1 versus 1.2 percentage points)” and contributed 1.5 percentage points to the overall EPR decline. The LFP was 57.1% overall in 2012, with the male LFP at 81.3% and the female LFP at 31.8% (International Labour Office, 2013).

According to the Indian government, a woman must own and operate a business with a minimum financial stake of 51% of the capital and provide at least 51% of the jobs created by the business to women. Women produce 50% of the world's food and undertake 66% of the labour, but they only receive 10% of the money and hold 1% of the property (World Bank, 2011). In India, women make up 49.5 percent of the world's population, but only 40.8 percent of the official sector work-force. India has historically been a nation controlled by men. However, the passage of time has changed. Indian women have expressed displeasure over the fact that they have been deferring to men's dictates for hundreds of years.

Bangladeshi women have come around in the last ten years, leaving home to work outside. Women have made significant contributions to the small and medium enterprise (SME) sector, which is estimated to account for 25% of Bangladesh's GDP (Afroze, 2021). Today's female business owners play a critical role in commerce, industry, and business. Just recently, they started running the business in India (Sumana, 2017), but women have already demonstrated their great relevance in fields like economics, administration, engineering, medicine, technology, social work, handicrafts, agro-business, and education. That is also true in developed nations, and recently they have begun working in these disciplines in their countries.

In Pakistan, the country's economy for women shows the complicated interaction of various factors that can be divided into two main groups. The first comprises components from society, culture, tradition, and religion. The caste culture, which is rooted in this part of the environment, and the decreased status of women are both obvious evidence of how it has developed over many generations. As it derives respectability from the sustaining of a traditional attitude, established traditions, and a strong belief system, this type of system's gender

discrimination is strict and deeply ingrained. The second set of factors comes from the previous batch and includes institutional processes, government documents, regulatory frameworks, and constitutional structures (Nabeel, 2003).

Women typically have a poorer social status in Nepalese society than males and are expected to work at home. They do not have their families' complete support when they start their businesses. Due to their lack of faith in women's capacity to manage a company successfully, male family members do not want to put their money in a firm controlled by a woman. Even if a woman has support from her family to work outside the home, it is generally in a government job (Acharya & Pandey, 2018).

Four important issues have traditionally affected women's entrepreneurship in Sri Lanka: their limited access to capital; their lack of business expertise; an inadequate policy and regulatory environment; and a lack of data and other supporting information on which to base policies and procedures. The improvement of Sri Lanka's economy is also significantly assisted by female entrepreneurship. As a result, Sri Lanka's female labour participation rate is a reliable indicator of how much women contribute to the country's economy (Pathirannehelage, 2018).

The socioeconomic independence enjoyed by Maldivian women has traditionally been much greater. However, this freedom has recently been decreasing due to a more conservative approach, which has strengthened restrictions and social stigmas. According to the 2005 Human Rights Commission's baseline survey, 79.0% of women and 72.9% of men agreed that men and women should have equal rights in all aspects of life, including the workplace. In the follow-up survey conducted in 2011, just 57.6% of men and 80.5% of women shared the same opinions on equality (United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women, 2018).

4. Women in Afghanistan

In 1919, Amānullāh Khan implemented administrative, economic, and social reforms to enhance women's rights. He established mixed schools for girls and boys, outlawed compelled marriages, and spoke out against polygamy and mandatory clothing regulations. Queen Soraya removed her veil and founded the first women's journal in Afghanistan, promoting gender equality. By the early 1990s, it was estimated that nearly 70% of schoolteachers, 50% of government workers and

university students, and 40% of doctors in Kabul were women. In 2001, the Ministry of Women's Affairs was established as the primary agency for promoting the advancement and rights of women in Afghanistan (Leclerc & Shreeves, 2023).

The World Bank and the International Finance Corporation study, in 2008, cleared that women's participation in business, female top managers, and permanent full-time workers were female and permanent full-time production workers who are female in Afghanistan was significantly lower across indicators, compared with the South Asia region and global average (Echavez et al., 2014).

Kuehnast et al. (2012) have done research on "Women's Programs in Afghanistan and Iraq", revealing that, in the economic sphere, women in Afghanistan should not be limited to the lowest-paying jobs, as well as large gaps in educational and vocational training demand attention. This research indicated that Afghan women encounter obstacles in reaching out beyond urban elites to non-elite women, especially those women who are in provinces and remote areas. Culture and religion have been used to undermine efforts to support women's education, economic access, and political involvement. According to a research on peacebuilding efforts on women in Afghanistan and Iraq, women in both countries faced the obstacles of lack of access to education and awareness of their rights and revealed the challenges on the pursuit of employment, including division among women, women's economic dependence.

Ashraf and Amjad (2018) found a positive and significant relationship between women's status and the human development index (HDI). It showed that a 1% increase in human development causes a 0.586% decrease in gender inequality. Morrisson et al. (2008) also found similar results. However, economic deprivation has a negative and significant impact on women's status in the context of Pakistan. The findings indicate that as the level of education increases, the overall status of women also increases.

Care (2020) surveyed 320 people in 2020 and found the result that in Afghanistan, 67% of women cannot go to health services without accompanying a man, and 73% of women said they do not know about family planning. In addition, it revealed that 87% of women experienced some form of Gender-based violence, and 55% of women prioritised cash to make up for income losses, figuring just 8% of people have received social assistance.

The 2021 UNDP report related to the gender inequality index - a composite measure reflecting on the maternal mortality rate in Afghanistan- published the following results: the 638 per 100,000 live births in 2017; the adolescent birth rate was 82.6 per 1,000 women ages (15-19) in 2021; population with least some secondary education was 6.4 female and 14.9 for male ages 25 and older, in 2021; and labour participation rate 14.8 for female and 66.5% for male ages 15 and older (United Nations Development Programme, 2023). The Human Development Report (2021) elucidated the gender inequalities between Afghanistan and neighbouring countries. Afghanistan has the highest gender disparity, with a GII value of 0.655. Pakistan, Iran, and China also have the lowest gender disparities among neighbouring countries (HDR, 2021).

5. Analysing GDI, GII and HDI data.

Regarding the methodology, the research was based on secondary data, collected from different reports published by UNDP until 2021. The data relating to the various indices and indicators about Afghanistan and its six neighbouring countries have been selected, filtered, and tabulated for comparison.

5.1. Gender Development Index (GDI).

As previously said, the Gender Development Index (GDI) is a yardstick to measure gender gaps in human development achievements through the calculation of the differentiation among women and men based on three important indicators of human development, for instance education, health, and income. The measurement mechanism for this Index is to find out the ratio of the female human development index to the male human development index. It was introduced by HDRO, in 2014, and currently is calculated for 167 countries. According to the GDI, countries are divided into five groups, based on the absolute deviation from gender equalisation in human development index values.

The first group of countries, which has less than 2.5 percent absolute deviation, shows high parity in HDI achievements between genders. The second group includes the countries, which show a medium-high parity in HDI achievements between women and men, and its absolute deviation is between 2.5% and 5%. The third category included countries that represent

the medium parity in HDI achievements among women and men, its absolute deviation is between 5% and 7.5%. The fourth group consists of counties whose absolute deviation varies from 7.5% to 10% showing the medium-low equalisation in HDI achievement between women and men. Finally, the fifth and last group consists of the countries that have low parity in HDI achievement among women and men, and its absolute deviation lies greater than 10%.

The following table (Table 1) depicts the values of the GDI of Afghanistan and its six neighbouring countries, as given in the HDR of 2021. It is evident that among the seven countries, four of them, for instance Afghanistan, Pakistan, Tajikistan, and Iran, are located in the fifth group, which shows high inequality between women and men. Uzbekistan is located in the third group, which is showing medium equality, and China is located in the second group, which is showing medium-high parity between women and men. For Turkmenistan, the author did not find GDI.

Table 1: Gender Development Index for Afghanistan and its Neighbour Countries (2019)

Country	Gender Development Index		Human Development Index		Life expectancy at birth		Expected years of schooling		Mean years of schooling		Estimated gross national income per capita	
	Value	Group	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M
Iran Islamic Republic of	0.866	5	0.709	0.819	77.9	75.6	14.6	15.0	10.3	10.4	4,084	20,637
China	0.957	2	0.747	0.777	79.2	74.8	14.0	14.0	7.7	8.4	12,633	19,308
Uzbekistan	0.939	3	0.695	0.740	73.8	69.6	11.9	12.2	11.6	12.0	5,064	9,230
Turkmenistan	—	—	—	—	71.7	64.7	10.9	11.5	—	—	10,493	19,461
Tajikistan	0.823	5	0.586	0.721	73.4	68.9	10.7	12.6	10.2	11.3	1,440	6,427
Pakistan	0.745	5	0.456	0.612	68.3	66.3	7.6	8.9	3.8	6.3	1,393	8,412
Afghanistan	0.659	5	0.391	0.593	66.4	63.4	7.7	12.5	1.9	6.0	819	3,566

Very high human development	0.981	—	0.886	0.903	82.4	76.8	16.6	16.0	12.0	12.2	33,668	55,720
High human development	0.961	—	0.736	0.766	78.0	72.8	14.1	13.9	8.2	8.7	10,529	17,912
Medium human development	0.835	—	0.567	0.679	70.8	67.9	11.7	11.4	5.3	8.1	2,530	9,598
Low human development	0.861	—	0.474	0.551	63.0	59.9	8.7	10.1	3.9	6.0	2,043	3,446
South Asia	0.824	—	0.570	0.692	71.3	68.7	11.9	11.5	5.5	8.4	2,393	10,416
World	0.943	—	0.714	0.757	75.0	70.6	12.7	12.7	8.1	9.2	12,063	21,323

Source: HDR 2021.

Table 1 indicates the Gender Development Index for Afghanistan and its neighbouring countries (2019), clarifying the human development and gender development indexes with sub-dimensions, like: life expectancy at birth, expected years of schooling, mean years of schooling, and estimated gross national income per capita. Depicts the values of the GDI of Afghanistan and its six neighbouring countries, as given in the HDR of 2021.

It is evident that four of the seven countries, for instance Afghanistan, Pakistan, Tajikistan, and Iran, are located in the fifth group, which shows high inequality between women and men. Uzbekistan is located in the third group showing medium equality and China is in the second group, showing medium-high parity between women and men. For Turkmenistan, there is no record in GDI.

5.2. Gender Inequality Index (GII)

Gender Inequality remains a paramount issue in human development in most nations. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) has developed the Gender Inequality Index (GII) to measure this inequality. The GII assesses gender disparities based on three indicators of the Human Development Index. The first dimension is health, which is measured by two indicators: maternal mortality rate and adolescent birth rates. The three dimensions of gender inequality are economic status, empowerment, and health. Empowerment is constructed by the combination of

two elements: the ratio of parliamentary seats occupied by women and the ratio of adult females and males in the aspect of secondary education. The proportion of female and male labour force participation rates in the labour market measures economic status.

The flowing table elucidates the gender inequalities between Afghanistan and its six neighbouring countries, based on the Human Development Report of 2021. It is clear to see that the country with the highest gender disparity is Afghanistan, with a GII value of 0.655, and after that, Pakistan, Iran, and China have the lowest gender disparities among these seven countries.

Out of the five indicators of GII, the maternal mortality ratio and the adolescent birth rate are highest in Afghanistan, the share of seats in Parliament and labour force participation is lowest in Iran, and, again, the population with at least some secondary education is lowest in Afghanistan. Iran despite having a better performance regarding the HDI than the other six countries performed weakly on the aspect of gender equality.

To put it concisely, one can say that, among these seven countries, Afghanistan had the highest GII value, followed by Pakistan and Iran. In contrast, China had the lowest GII. The weak performance of these three countries in terms of the gender inequality index can be attributed to their customs and traditions. In particular, Afghanistan's war and internal conflict are major contributing factors.

Table 2: Gender Inequality Index for Afghanistan and its six neighbour countries (2019)

Country	Gender Inequality Index		Rank	Maternal mortality ratio	Adolescent birth rate	Share of seats in parliament	Population with at least some secondary education		Labour force participation rate	
	Value	Rank					Ranking among neighbour's country	(Deaths per 100,000 live births)	Births per 1,000 women ages 15-19)	(% of held by women)
			F	M	F	M				
Iran Islamic Republic of	0.459	113	4	16	40.6	5.9	67.4	72.8	17.5	71.5
China	0.168	39	1	29	7.6	24.9	76.0	83.3	60.5	75.3

Uzbekistan	0.288	62	2	29	23.8	16.4	99.9	100.0	52.4	78.1
Turkmenistan	—	—	—	7	24.4	25.0	—	—	51.4	78.3
Tajikistan	0.314	70	3	17	57.1	20.0	93.3	95.7	31.3	52.8
Pakistan	0.538	135	5	140	38.8	20.0	27.6	45.7	21.9	81.7
Afghanistan	0.655	157	6	638	69.0	27.2	13.2	36.9	21.6	74.7
Very high human development	0.173	—	—	14	17.2	28.3	86.5	88.6	52.3	69.1
High human development	0.340	—	—	62	33.6	24.5	69.8	75.1	54.2	75.4
Medium human development	0.501	—	—	161	34.6	20.4	30.1	46.3	28.3	77.1
Low human development	0.592	—	—	572	102.8	22.2	17.2	30.1	57.7	72.3
South Asia	0.505	—	—	149	26.0	17.5	31.3	48.4	23.2	77.0
World	0.436	—	—	204	43.3	24.6	61.0	68.3	47.2	74.2

Source: HDR 2021

The table 2 elucidates the gender inequalities between Afghanistan and its six neighbouring countries based on the 2021 Human Development Report. It is clear that the country with the highest gender disparity is Afghanistan, with a GII value of 0.655. After that, Pakistan is 0.538, and Iran is 0.459. China is 0.168 and has the lowest gender disparities among these seven countries.

Among the five indicators of GII, the maternal mortality ratio and the adolescent birth rate are highest in Afghanistan. The share of seats in Parliament and labour force participation is lowest in Turkmenistan. Maternal mortality, with a ratio of 7, and the population with at least some secondary education is lowest in Afghanistan, with a ratio 13.2 girls and 36.9 boys. Moreover, Uzbekistan has the highest in secondary education with a figure of 99.9 girls and 100

boys. Iran, despite having better performance, regarding the HDI, than the other six countries, performed weakly on the aspect of gender equality.

Afghanistan had the highest GII value among these seven countries, with a figure of 0.655, followed by Pakistan and Iran. In contrast, China had the lowest ratio of 0.168 GII. In ranking among the neighbouring countries, China is first and Afghanistan is last ranking in gender development among the neighbouring countries.

Since the Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM) project's beginning in 1999, data have shown that women participate in entrepreneurship significantly. This participation range varies greatly from country to country. Despite these national variations, the female participation rates across countries are quantifiable at roughly two-thirds of men. These findings imply that many of the same factors that have an impact on males also have an impact on women when making entrepreneurial decisions. The GEM statistics also show consistent patterns in entrepreneurial mind-sets across genders and ages. Even though women's prevalence rates are often lower than men's, women's entrepreneurial activity is distributed similarly to men's throughout all age groups.

5.3. Human Development Index (HDI) in Afghanistan and its neighbouring countries

Human development has become a paramount important aspect of the Economy. Since times immemorial, there are disparities in the trend of human development visible in Afghanistan and its neighbouring countries. To reveal this inequality, the data from the recent human development report has been analysed in this section (Table 3).

Table 3: Human Development Index and its components for Afghanistan and its neighbour countries

			SDG3	SDG4.3	SDG4.4	SDG8.5		
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HDI Rank	Countries	Human Development Index (HDI)	Life expectancy at birth	Expected years of schooling	Mean years of schooling	Gross national income (GNI) per capita	GNI per capita rank minus HDI rank	HDI rank
2019		2019	2019	2019	2019	2019	2019	2018
70	Iran Islamic Republic of	0.783	76.7	14.8	10.3	12,447	26	70
85	China	0.761	76.9	14.0	8.1	16,057	-11	87
106	Uzbekistan	0.720	71.7	12.1	11.8	7,142	17	107
111	Turkmenistan	0.715	68.2	11.2	10.3	14,909	-32	112
125	Tajikistan	0.668	71.1	11.7	10.7	3,954	25	126
154	Pakistan	0.557	67.3	8.3	5.2	5,005	-15	154
169	Afghanistan	0.511	64.8	10.2	3.9	2,229	0	169
	Very high human development	0.898	79.6	16.3	12.2	44,566	—	—
	High human development	0.753	75.3	14.0	8.4	14,255	—	—
	Medium human development	0.631	69.3	11.5	6.3	6,153	—	—
	Low human development	0.513	61.4	9.4	4.9	2,745	—	—
	South Asia	0.641	69.9	11.7	6.5	6,532	—	—
	World	0.737	72.8	12.7	8.5	16,743	—	—

Source: HDR 2021

The above Table 3 depicts the Human Development Index and its components for Afghanistan and its six neighbouring countries along with ranking. It is clear, from the Table 3, that Iran (the Islamic Republic) has the highest human development index and is located in the first position with a ranking of 70 and a value of 0.783 out of the seven countries.

After that, China is in the second position, with a ranking of 85 and a value of 0.761. Uzbekistan got the third position, with a ranking of 106 and a value of 0.720. Turkmenistan got the fourth position, with a ranking of 111 and a value of 0.715. Tajikistan is located at the fifth position, with the ranking 125 and value of 0.668. Pakistan got the sixth position, with ranking

154 and value of 0.557. Finally, Afghanistan got the seventh position, with a ranking of 169 and value of 0.511.

By comparing Iran and China, which are located in the first and second positions (Table 4), one can reach in conclusion that, among the different indicators of the Human Development Index, Iran is better in education indicators and China is better in income indicators.

Table 4: Average annual Human Development Index growth from 1990 to 2019 (in %)

Country	Change in HDI in rank	1990-2000	2000-2010	2010-2019	1990-2019
Iran Islamic Republic of	1	1.54	1.21	0.60	1.13
China	12	1.65	1.74	0.95	1.47
Uzbekistan	4	..	1.11	0.82	..
Turkmenistan	4	0.79	..
Tajikistan	-2	-1.05	1.40	0.51	0.27
Pakistan	2	1.07	1.37	0.94	1.13
Afghanistan	-5	1.49	3.04	0.89	1.83
Very high human development		0.55	0.52	0.35	0.48
High human development		1.04	1.15	0.73	0.98
Medium human development		1.29	1.50	1.12	1.31
Low human development		1.00	2.08	1.03	1.38
South Asia		1.36	1.47	1.12	1.33
World		0.69	0.82	0.59	0.71

Source: HDI, 2021

The table 4 above provides information regarding the annual Human Development Index growth for the period 1990 to 2019. It is evident from the table that the Islamic Republic of Iran had a positive annual HDI growth during the three decades. However, in the last decade, it had less growth among all seven countries. China also had growth, despite it having rapid annual growth in the first two decades and diminished in the last decade.

For Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan, due to the unavailability of data, it is not possible to have a complete growth rate. However, a growth in shown. Tajikistan did not grow in the first

decade, but, in the next two decades, it had growth. Pakistan also had growth during the three decades, but, in the last decade, it decreased.

Finally, Afghanistan also had growth during the three decades, but, in the second decade, it had the highest growth among all seven countries. The reason would be the financial assistance of the world community. But, in third decade coming down because, between 2010- 2019, the financial assistance has deceased, NATO decided to move from Afghanistan, because of security concern many investors did not invested, and, finally, the inflation and unemployment has negative effect on gender development accordingly .

5.4. Women Entrepreneurs in South Asian Countries

In South Asia, there has been some improvement in the awareness and support of women's economic involvement over the last two decades. Firstly, national policy frameworks are increasingly aware of the critical role women's economic empowerment and gender equality play in achieving national economic goals, poverty reduction, and long-term development. Secondly, the impact of the informal economy on economic growth has now been identified.

Table 5: Gender Structure of Waged Employment per Sector, South Asia

Sector / Country	Afgh	Bodl	Bht	Ind	Mld	Npl	Pak	SR L
Agriculture								
% of GDP	23.5	16.1	17.7	17.4	3.5	33.8	24.9	8.6
Agriculture Employment as % of Total Employment	40	45.4	92.9	54.4	14.7	92.9	43.7	42.5
% of females in agriculture employment	32.1	52.0	34.7	32.4	-	48.1	29.6	37.4
% of female agriculture employment	19	64.84	30	35.9	60	84.3	75	38
Industry								
% of GDP	22.3	27.6	42.9	30	19.4	15.4	21	30.6
% of industry employment in total employment	-	-	9	25	-	-	23.4	26.1
% Female industry employment in total employment	-	12.5	9	18	32	-	12	25
Services								

% of GDP	54.2	56.3	39.4	52.6	77.1	50.7	54.2	60.8
% Service employment in total employment	-	-	-	-	-	-	33.9	42.9
% Female service employment	-	19.4	6.6 [^]	36.9	56	6.1 [^]	13.9 [^]	27

Notes: Afgh = Afghanistan, Bodl = Bangladesh, Bht = Bhutan, Ind = India, Mld = Maldives, Npl = Nepal, Pak=Pakistan, SRL = Shrilanka.

Sources: World Bank (2016a), World Bank (2016b), and World Bank (2016c) - Sections: World Bank National Accounts Data; OECD (2021) - Section: National Accounts Data Files.

Table 5 above highlights the wage employment in different sectors (agriculture, industry, and service) in South Asian countries. In Afghanistan, only 19 percent of women were involved in agriculture. However, in other South Asian countries women were more involved in agriculture. Nepal had the highest proportion of women involved in agriculture, with 84.3 percent. In Afghanistan, there are no women involved in Industry and service sectors, and other countries have more women working in the mentioned sector except Nepal.

Conclusions

For the construction of the gender-related development index, using the UNDP methodology, of the gender development index, equal weighting was given to the health, education, and income variables. There has cleared huge disparities in gender development between Afghanistan and its six neighbouring countries, some are located in the High Human Development and Gender Development group, some are in the Medium group and some are in the Low Human Development group.

Looking at the annual growth of the Human Development Index, from 1990 to 2019, one see that China also had growth, although it had rapid annual growth in the first two decades, but it slowed down in the last decade. Pakistan also had growth during the three decades, but it declined in the last decade. Finally, Afghanistan also had growth over the three decades, but in decade three, because of security concerns, NATO moving from Afghanistan, inflation, and increased the unemployment rate the gender development has come down. However, it had the highest growth of all seven countries in the second decade. The reason for this may have been the financial support it received from the international community.

It can be seen that four of the seven countries, for instance Afghanistan, Pakistan, Tajikistan and Iran, are in the fifth group with high inequality between women and men. Uzbekistan is in the third group, with medium equality, and China is in the second group, with medium-high parity between women and men. Turkmenistan has the lowest rate of maternal mortality with a ratio of 7, and again Afghanistan has the lowest population with at least some secondary education with a ratio of 13.2 girls and 36.9 boys.

This research was considered before the Taliban took over Afghanistan, but, after 2021, the gender development has changed due to restrictions against women. Taliban do not allow women to work or do not allow girls to go to university and school, which have a direct negative impact on gender and human development in Afghanistan.

The author suggests, for further investigations, to look for that gap and find it. Certainly, the neighbouring countries and the South Asian countries have improved in the last three years. According to the literature reviewed, there have been positive changes in the status of women in Islamic countries.

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