

MY RIGHTS MY VOICE

AFGHANISTAN PROJECT OVERVIEW



OXFAM

MY RIGHTS, MY VOICE IN AFGHANISTAN

- Children and young people in Afghanistan have huge potential to transform their lives and communities. With the right skills and support, they can be a driving force to break the cycle of poverty so many are born into.
- To help them achieve their potential, their rights to health and education must be fulfilled. That is why Oxfam is running a three-year project in Afghanistan as part of the international My Rights, My Voice programme, to empower children and young people claim their rights to quality health and education.
- Through a network of youth groups, the project trains young people to lobby decision-makers and help shift social attitudes (especially over girls' participation). It also strengthens civil society to lobby the government for lasting policy changes.
- Working with children and young people, and those who influence their lives, My Rights, My Voice is empowering them to achieve lasting changes in policies, practices and beliefs, so their health and education needs are met – now and in the future.

THE CHALLENGE

Across Afghanistan's patriarchal society, awareness of children's and young people's rights is low – even though 68 per cent of the population is aged 12-25, and half of this group is under 15. Numerous social and cultural barriers prevent children and young people – particularly girls and young women – from participating in many aspects of social, cultural and economic life. Although Afghanistan has ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the UN has raised serious concerns over the lack of health and education services for children and young people.

School enrolment is low, particularly among girls and for all children in remote areas. Insufficient budgets mean a shortage of schools (especially for girls), trained teachers (especially women teachers) and equipment. Culturally, girls' education is

often seen as 'unnecessary' or 'harmful' and women's and girls' participation in decision-making about their lives remains severely limited. Early marriages also block their education – as well as endangering their lives. Pregnancy in teenage wives is a leading cause of maternal mortality, and high fertility rates and lack of spacing between births mean extremely poor health for many young women. With underfunded health facilities, a lack of female medical staff, taboos around women's health issues and little reproductive health education, almost half of all deaths among women of reproductive age are a result of pregnancy and childbirth. Most of these are preventable. In addition, a third of children in rural areas have access to no health facilities at all.

OUR APPROACH

In response, My Rights, My Voice is building a strong youth movement to empower children

and young people to claim their rights to quality health and education. We are working with our local partners ACSFO, OHW and ASCHIANA in two rural provinces (Daikundi and Badakhshan) and two urban (Balkh and Kabul) to support young people aged 12-25 to drive policy change that will improve their access to quality health and education services. With a special focus on involving young women and girls, the project has five approaches:

Increasing youth leadership and collective action

With our partners, we are creating youth groups at community, district, provincial and university levels, and training members in child and youth rights to health and education. Young people, including girls and women, are learning to access information and use it for campaigning and monitoring health and education services. Connected through social networking sites, the internet and mobile phones, the groups are building strong alliances to influence decision-makers. Representatives are being trained as trainers, so they can share their learning with young people in their own communities. They are also learning from their international

peers at forums such as the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation.

Enabling young people to demand better health and education

Youth representatives (at least 35 per cent of them women) are receiving media and communications training so they can campaign for their health and education rights. The project helps them develop campaign materials, including radio slots and booklets on rights, legal frameworks and support bodies – all emphasising the particular challenges facing girls and young women. Young people are using these to lobby decision-makers, generate media coverage and underpin events such as a nationwide letter-writing campaign for schoolgirls to voice their needs to the national government.

Raising wider awareness of youth rights

So that parents, communities, religious leaders, civil society and the government understand and support youth rights, we are holding awareness-raising discussions in 120 communities. These are designed to gain their acceptance of the project and



PHOTO: ELISSA BOGOS

their wider support for young people's active participation in ensuring their rights are fulfilled. We make sure women take part in these sessions, and stress the need for both girls and boys to participate actively in youth groups, as well as in their communities.

Supporting policy change

Through project partner organisations, My Rights, My Voice will advocate directly with national ministries for the prioritisation of child and youth rights in health and education policies. We are pressing ministers for laws and regulations to ensure young people can participate in policy development, and monitoring health and education services for young people, sharing accurate information to shape rights-driven policies.

Strengthening civil society to advocate for youth rights

Through alliances and training, we are helping national civil society organisations to engage with young people, the government, the media and each other. We are training

them to participate in national education and health campaigns, track budgets and monitor the services young people receive, so their health and education rights can be pushed sustainably.

A LASTING LEGACY

My Rights, My Voice is enabling around 12,000 children and young people in some of Afghanistan's poorest areas to demand fulfilment of their rights to quality public health and education. With its emphasis on effective communication and girls' rights, the project has a wide 'trickle down' effect, benefitting far more young people than those immediately involved. By increasing government engagement with children and young people, it will help generate plans and budgets that reflect their concerns. This will mean Afghanistan's young people can access the health and education services they need if they are to fulfil their potential and help rebuild their country.

FIND OUT MORE

My Rights, My Voice is a three-year programme which aims to engage marginalised children and youth in their rights to health and education services. It is being jointly implemented by Oxfam GB and Oxfam Novib, and involves Oxfam Quebec in Niger. Working through our local partners in eight countries, My Rights, My Voice has significant funding from the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida).

To find out more about the programme please mail us at: mrmv@oxfam.org.uk or visit us at www.oxfam.org.uk/myrightsmymyvoice

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