Our Country
My Role
A Resource Book

Supporting the participation of Afghanistan's women in politics and civil society
Afghanistan is emerging from a very painful and difficult era. All Afghans – women and men – suffered greatly from war, destruction and insecurity. The protracted crisis also isolated them from the rest of the world, its progress and its changes. There was no security and no freedom, no chance to discuss political matters openly or to get information and education.

Now this terrible time is ending and Afghans have chosen democracy. This makes them part of a larger democratic family, and part of the worldwide effort to create a global society that is fair, free, and equal. They have decided on the necessary next steps to realize such a society. These steps include, as one essential ingredient, the full and free participation of the Afghan people in rebuilding their country.

This book is intended to assist Afghan women as they take their place in this historic effort. In it, they will find a discussion of some key aspects of democracy, as well as stories about the part that women worldwide have played in the development of democratic societies. The short-term goal of this book is to boost the participation of women in the upcoming Afghan elections. The larger goal is to support Afghan women as they take an interest in how politics works, and develop their skills in taking an active part in the political process.

There are many different kinds of women living in Afghanistan today. Some have a university education, work as professionals, and have traveled widely in the outside world. They may already be familiar with most or all of the content, but still might find this book a useful tool for sharing that knowledge with other women who have had less exposure to the subject.

Afghan women have shown competency, strength and resourcefulness in mastering the challenges of the last years, helping their families and communities survive. Nevertheless, the great majority of Afghan women are illiterate. For this reason, this book exists also in a parallel audio-version on cassettes.

This book can, of course, simply be read by an individual. However, it is also designed to serve as the material for training workshops for small groups. The outline for such workshops, with guidelines for the group leader and suggested exercises and discussion points can be found in a separate section at the end of the book.

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CHAPTER ONE: GETTING STARTED

After 30 years of war and civil war, Afghanistan is finally on its way to peace and prosperity. This cannot happen overnight. What was destroyed has to be rebuilt; time that was lost for learning and development needs to be made up and Afghanistan must work hard to take its rightful place in the world community of peaceful, democratic nations. This is a big job. The effort of each and every family and each and every individual is necessary, including the women.

No country can grow and succeed without the participation of its women. In fact, there are a number of international proverbs that express exactly this:

"A bird cannot fly with just one wing."
"Women hold up half the sky."

What do you think?

What do these proverbs mean? What are some of the things women contribute, that a society could not exist without? What do you personally do that is helpful and important to your family, your friends and your neighborhood?

Some people think that politics is more a matter for men than for women. In fact, it is quite dangerous for a country if women stay out of politics. In such a country, the needs of the ordinary people, and of children and families, will not be well represented. Also, government and business work better, more efficiently and more honestly when women are involved. World Bank studies show that corruption and bad management are much less common when women are included in an institution in sufficient numbers.

Women are important to the political life of a country because:

- In most countries of the world, they are slightly more than half of the population – this means they are the majority, the country’s larger part. Obviously, you cannot have a democracy (government by the people) if the majority of the people are not even taking part.

- Women take care of the children and raise the next generation. Mothers who are intelligent, educated, happy and healthy are more likely to have intelligent, educated, happy and healthy children.

- Women are more in tune with the daily life of a society and its families. If they are heard, they can make sure that the government understands the situation and the problems of families and children, and that it pays enough attention to these matters.

- The terrible years that Afghanistan has experienced show that peace, freedom, and a society in which everyone is treated fairly and with respect cannot be taken for granted. These things can be lost, and everyone can be forced to live in great darkness and suffering. If you want to live in a country that is peaceful, safe, where you are respected
as a human being, and where you and your family can enjoy a good life, then you have to make sure that you have a good government of honest people who will build and defend this kind of a country. As a woman, you have to raise your voice for the things that are important for you and your family – to make sure that Afghanistan does not go back to the violence and ignorance of the past years.

Afghanistan has chosen a hopeful and positive direction. It has many friends all around the world who wish it well and are prepared to help. It has a new constitution; one that many other countries in the region have expressed admiration for. Some other countries have even started to copy some of the good ideas from the Afghan constitution, such as protecting the language rights of their minorities, and guaranteeing that there will be at least a reasonable number of women in elected bodies by reserving seats for them.

Women were part of the commission that drafted this constitution, and part of the loya jirga that ratified it. But they could not have succeeded without the help and support of the many male members of the loya jirga who voted in support of the interests and rights of women. These men were anxious to have a real and solid democracy and to safeguard against a return to the bad times of the past.

There are important milestones ahead, including the upcoming election to decide Afghanistan’s government. Afghanistan is on the right road, but the process is not finished yet, and things can still go wrong. It would be dangerous to just sit back and hope that things will go well, or that someone else will take care of matters! Everyone’s strength is needed to defend peace and democracy in Afghanistan, and to build a prosperous new country that can take its place in the world. Can men have babies and build families all on their own? Can they manage a household and a family by themselves? No. And they can’t create a government and rebuild a country all by themselves, either. It takes the energies of both men and women.

Running a government is like managing a family

Think about some of the things that need to be taken care of in a family:

Prepare the meals to feed everyone
Take care of the person who is sick
Earn money
Clean whatever is dirty, such as laundry and dishes
Decorate the house so it will look nice
Buy needed items from the market or shop
If the family produces something, such as carpets, sell them
Visit friends and relatives and have them visit you
If you have a disagreement with a friend or neighbour, talk to them and try to fix it
Teach the young children how to eat, talk, walk and behave properly
These are no different from what needs to be taken care of in a country. In fact they are exactly the same. The only difference is in the size. A government does the same things that a good wife and husband do for their family, it just does them in a bigger way.

And have you noticed? All the jobs on this list are things which women can certainly do. In fact, most of them are things that are part of a housewife’s everyday, normal responsibility.

Let’s look at how the things that are done in a family, are just like the things that are done by a government:

**Ministry of Health**
Taking care of those who are sick.

**Ministry of Trade**
Buys things the country needs, and sells things the country produces.

**Ministry of Foreign Affairs**
Keeping good relations with countries who are friends, and trying to resolve disputes with countries where one has a conflict.

**Ministry of Education**
Making sure that children and young people can go to school and learn.

**Ministry of Agriculture**
Making sure there is enough food.

**Mayor**
Making sure the city is clean, the garbage is collected and that the streets and parks look nice.

Women sometimes think of politics as something strange and frightening. There is no need to think this way. There is nothing mysterious or extremely difficult about what a government does, and there is no special secret involved that only men know. All over the world today, women are running ministries such as the ones described above, or are mayors of cities and even presidents of countries. We will meet some of these women in a later section.

Of course it is necessary to be educated in order to do this work well. But even more, it is necessary to have the same qualifications that make a good housewife: to be practical and not extravagant, to be honest and really care about the well being of the family/country, to get along well with others and create a peaceful atmosphere.

In this book, you will find out more about:

- Words and ideas used when thinking about public life.
- The lives of some women who overcame great obstacles and made a difference, and are honored by their countries today.
- The stories of some of Afghanistan’s famous women.
• Human rights, how they were defined and what they have to do with your life.

• How ordinary people can make a difference in the community and take part in politics.

• How promoting human rights can make your family's life better.

• Why voting is important.

First, let's look at some of the terms that will be used in this handbook.

What is democracy?

Democracy is not a modern or a new idea, but has been developing since the 5th century BC. Democracy means government by the people. Several key things must be present for a country to be considered a democracy: Rule of Law, Due Process, Freedom of Expression, Human Rights and Elections.

1. Rule of law

This means that society is governed by rules that are known, that are fair, that apply to everyone equally and in the same way, and that are enforced and respected. In a democracy, no-one is above the law, no matter how rich or important they are. Under rule of law, it is not up to some powerful person to decide things however he likes; there are laws, rules and procedures and if they are broken, then there is somewhere you can go to complain, where you can be sure that you will get a fair hearing. It isn't necessary to ask for favors, or pay bribes, or be afraid of threats because decisions are made on the basis of laws and rules and there are ways to get justice if someone breaks these laws and rules.

In a feudal society, everyone is not equal: the rules are made by those who have power and changed or broken whenever they like. Many countries and societies have made the change from a feudal order to a democratic order with rule of law. This change is not easy and it is not accomplished overnight.

Passengers on Ariana Airlines

Passengers on Ariana Airlines have been complaining about their experiences. One person reports, "My flight did not leave on time. The departure time came, and we all got on board. But then we sat in the airplane for two hours, just waiting. Finally someone told us the reason: some important person wanted to travel on our flight, but he had slept too long, and now he wanted to finish his breakfast at home before he came to the airport. So the airplane and all of the passengers had to wait for him."

Another person says, "Smoking cigarettes is not allowed on any airplane of any airline, anywhere in the world, because it is not safe. But on Ariana Airlines, important people smoke a cigarette whenever they want to, during the flight."

Finally, a third person told us, "I have a problem with my back, so I bought a first class ticket for the flight, even though it is much more expensive. But when I went to sit down in my seat, they told me I had to move to the back of the airplane, because an important person who did not have any ticket, wanted
to go on this flight. I did not get my money back and I did not get the seat I had paid for."

These are examples of the 'rule of law' being ignored, because some people are still thinking in feudal terms. In a feudal world, the airplane will leave whenever the important person says it will leave. But under rule of law, it will leave when the schedule says it will. Every passenger who has a ticket is equal, and there aren't any special rules for 'important people'. The only people who can delay a flight are the air traffic controller or the mechanic or the pilot, and only because there is an important technical reason, such as for example, the snowfall is too heavy and it wouldn't be safe to leave.

**What do you think?**

Can the modern world function on feudal principles? What would happen if airplanes flew without a plan, just whenever somebody important feels like it? There would be chaos in the sky, and many accidents.

Think about last week. Did you experience any example of 'feudal thinking'? Did you experience a successful example of the 'rule of law' working properly? What can you do when your rights are violated by 'feudal thinking'? What could the passengers in the above examples do?

**What you can do**

Write a letter of complaint and have as many other passengers as possible sign it. Take your letter to the ministry. Take it also to the newspapers. Once other airlines also fly to Afghanistan, which will begin in a few months, tell Ariana that you will give your business to them instead if they do not follow the correct rules.

**2. Due process**

What if someone accuses you of doing something wrong, or breaking a law? Maybe you are guilty – but what if you are innocent? In a democracy, a person is not just accused and punished quickly. Whoever accuses them has to prove that they really did something wrong. And not just anybody can hear this accusation and then decide. There is a procedure, established by the constitution and by the laws of the country. This includes such steps as complaining formally to the police or to a court, having a proper investigation to see what really happened, being allowed to bring witnesses and proofs, having a hearing or a trial.

You are not allowed to ruin a person's reputation, take away their livelihood, put them in prison or do anything similar unless they have had a fair trial, a chance to defend themselves, and an independent judge has decided their guilt.

**3. Freedom of expression**

Democracy includes important personal freedoms, such as freedom of speech, freedom of association, and freedom of the press. This means that people have the right to say their opinions, including their opinions about their political leaders and their government. They have the right to hold meetings with others and to attend meetings. For example, everyone – women and men – has the
right to attend political meetings. Freedom of the press means that newspapers, magazines, radio and television must be allowed to publish information and as many different opinions as they want, freely.

After so many years of fear, of people being forbidden to speak their mind, Afghanistan now has these rights guaranteed in the constitution. In a 'feudal order', you are only allowed to say what the powerful person likes to hear. If you say something they don't like, you can be punished.

Today, Afghanistan has freedom of the press: however, it will take some time to get used to the change. Several Afghan journalists have been threatened for expressing their views. This was undoubtedly very frightening for them – but each time, their right to speak and write freely was affirmed by the responsible authorities in the end and they did not lose their job, have their newspaper closed down or suffer in any other way.

Freedom of the press does not mean that you can be irresponsible. Freedom and responsibility go together. You cannot publish in a newspaper, or say on the radio, something which is not true and which will harm another person. You cannot use the media to stir people up to do bad things, such as attack somebody, or kill other people. You cannot write things that will encourage hatred, for example against another religious group or a minority. The press, too, must obey the rule of law.

**Newspaper article**

Two young men recently published an editorial explaining their views about correct governance. Here is what they wrote:

"One of the most important principles of Islam, which should be respected by all of its followers, is to use power properly and observe the government regulations and positions well.

Over the past two decades, we saw different people and groups who abused the holy principles of Islam, including jihad, emirate and Islamic caliphate. The best examples of a correct caliphate and emirate can be found in Islam's history. When a person was appointed as governor under true Islam, first his belongings were checked, to make sure that he did not later enrich himself by his office. Second, he had to agree to the following terms:

- Not to live a luxurious life
- Not to gain wealth for himself
- Not to seek personal comfort
- Instead to pay attention to the peoples' problems."

Some politicians, reading this editorial, saw it as a criticism of themselves and their own style of living. They tried to have the writers arrested. But other journalists defended them and refused to let the politician's security men take them away. The incident was reported in other countries, and many organizations watched out to see that the writers would be safe, and that their right to express their opinion would be respected.
4. Human rights

Afghanistan has a constitution, which describes the rights you have as an Afghan citizen. But we are not just citizens of a certain country. We are also all human beings, and we belong to the human community. The International Declaration of Human Rights, which was decided more than 50 years ago by the United Nations, is something like a constitution for the whole world. In fact, the Afghan Constitution mentions human rights as one of the most important things it respects, believes in and will defend. All democracies must support human rights. A later section of this booklet will talk more about human rights. If you want to see them now, you can go to page 58.

5. Elections

An important part of democracy is that the people have the power to choose who their leaders will be, which direction their country will take, and who will speak for them when decisions need to be made. Usually, this is done through elections.

In a 'perfect democracy', everyone would give their opinion about each and every decision that needs to be made; however, this is not possible or practical. Therefore, instead we choose someone to represent us in the government. We choose a person we trust, someone who we think will make good decisions, someone whose views we generally agree with.

Think about all the decisions that are necessary to run a country. Governments have to collect money, decide how to spend it the most wisely, make plans for the future, organize the police and army, negotiate with other countries and build-up trade. This requires thousands of decisions every day. Would it be possible for everybody to discuss all of these questions and then decide together? No. Instead, we choose people whose job it will be to discuss these things on our behalf and to make the decisions. We choose people who we think will decide in a way that we would agree with, and that will make our country better. We try to choose people who care about justice and about the country, not just about their own power or their own wealth. We choose them by holding elections, in which we vote for the person we think is best.

These elected leaders are not elected forever, only for a certain number of years. After this time is over, we think about whether they did a good job. If yes, we might want to vote for them again in the next election. If we think they did a bad job, then we will vote for somebody else the next time.

One more thing: history has taught us that it is better that no one person should hold all the power, that is why even a president who is doing a wonderful job, should not keep his position for too long. This is called a term limit. Depending on the position – president, minister, judge, etc. – there can be a different limit. The President of the United States is elected for four years. He or she can be elected for a second time, and be president for another four years. But after that, they cannot be elected again. It's someone else's turn to be president.
Who shall take the children when we go away?

Habiba and her husband are going to Zabul for a week. They will leave their two small children behind. Now they are discussing which of their relatives they should leave them with. The children can either stay with Habiba's sister Marghala, or with her other sister Makai. Habiba says, "I think we should leave the children with Makai. She is a careful mother and I like the way she takes care of her own children. They will be safe and happy with her. In her family, the rules are the same as in our own family. She will allow them to do the same things we allow them to do, and forbid them to do the things we don't allow. Marghala is a good woman and a good sister, but she has different opinions. She lets her son fly kites on the roof, and I don't let Ehsan do that, because I am too worried that he will fall. Makai is more like me, so I choose Makai."

In the same way, people choose between different candidates in an election. They choose the person they trust more, the person they agree with more, and the person they think will make the better decisions.

In an election, candidates from different political parties, who stand for different ideas, run for office. The voters decide which one of them is closest to their own opinions and beliefs, and can therefore best represent them.

What is registration?

To be a voter, you must meet two requirements. You have to be old enough to make sensible and responsible decisions. The law of each country decides the age when they think this is the case. In Afghanistan it is 18. In Iran, it is 16. Secondly, you have to be a citizen of the country whose government you are going to help choose.

There is no difference between men and women, both of them can vote if they are 18 and are citizens of Afghanistan.

Everyone must register beforehand. That way, the people who are organizing the election will have a list. When someone comes to vote, their name is crossed off the list. Then no-one can try to cheat and vote twice. And no-one who is not an Afghan can falsely try to vote in the Afghan election.

Some women in Afghanistan are nervous about registering. There is no reason to be worried. Registering is easy and you will not feel uncomfortable. You will go to a special registration centre for women, and it will be a woman who registers you. It takes only a few minutes. You will get a Voter Registration Card. It is better to have a card with your photograph on it, to make sure that no-one else can take your card and vote instead of you.

Several respected Islamic leaders in Afghanistan and other Muslim countries have said that it is all right for a woman to have her picture taken in order to vote. But if you or your family believe that it is not good to have your photograph taken, your view will be respected. You can still register and you can still get a card, with no photograph. You can give your fingerprint instead. On voting day, you can vote.
What is voting?

To vote means to express your view or opinion about what you think should be done, and who you think should be chosen as the leader. Voting is one of the ways in which a decision can be made by a group.

When a group needs to make a decision that will affect everyone, the different members of the group often have different ideas, and want different things. How can they decide? There are many ways.

One way to reach a decision is for the group to keep talking and discussing until they all agree, which is called a consensus. This is good, but it takes a lot of time, and sometimes it is just not possible to get everyone to agree.

Bus to Mazar-i-Sharif

Sometimes, one person in a group has to make the decision alone, because he or she is the only one who knows the best solution. For example, imagine that you are on a bus, going to Mazar-i-Sharif. The bus hits a big hole in the road and the driver stops. Everybody gets off the bus and looks at the tire. Can the bus keep going, or has the tire become too flat? Everybody might have an opinion, but the driver has to make this decision. He knows his bus best.

But in other decisions, it is better to find out what people prefer. Let's imagine that the bus driver had to stop and fix the tire. It took a long time. At the next rest area, he asks the passengers to decide if they want to stop, or if they want to keep driving to make up the lost time. He asks them, “How many people want to keep going?” Only two people put their hand up. “How many want to stop?” This time, 15 people raise their hand. It is better to stop, because this is what more people want to do.

Sometimes one person or one group doesn’t even ask the others what they think. Because they are the strongest, they declare themselves to be the boss. They refuse to listen to the wishes and opinions of others, and instead force the others to obey them. This is a dictatorship, not a democracy, and it is a bad form of government. It is not a good way to make decisions, or to have a happy life in a family or a country.

There are different ways to vote. Like the people in the bus, people sometimes vote by raising their hand. In some parliaments, the vote is taken by voice – those who are in favor of a decision loudly say ‘yes’, and those who are against it say ‘no’. The person who is in charge either counts the yes and no votes, or decides which one had more votes by listening to which one is louder.

Usually, if a decision is important, the best way to vote is by secret ballot. This way, everyone can vote the way they really want to. No one can be angry with them, or punish them afterwards, or not be their friend anymore, or use any kind of pressure against them, because no-one will know how another person voted. This prevents arguments and trouble and gives the person who is voting real freedom to choose.

When you are voting by secret ballot, each voter marks a mark on a paper to show the name or symbol of the person or decision he or she wants to vote
for. They don't show their paper to anybody else. When they have finished they drop their voting paper, called a **ballot**, into a box. This way, nobody knows who they voted for. Afterwards if people ask them who they voted for, they can tell them if they want to. Or they can say, "I can't tell you, because it was a secret ballot." Their name is not on the ballot paper so nobody who sees a ballot paper later can know whose it was.

**What do you think?**

Let's try out the different ways of voting. Let's decide if we are going to drink green tea or black tea. Everybody who wants green tea, raise their hand. And who prefers black tea?

What are some of the advantages and disadvantages of voting this way? One disadvantage is that if you are shy, or if you think your friend disagrees with you, you might not want to raise your hand. Or perhaps nobody wants to be the first to raise her hand — and so nobody will speak up. Sometimes you don't even have to waste time counting the hands, because it is obvious that many more hands were raised for one decision than for another.

Now let's try with our voices. I suggest that we all drink green tea. All in favor say Yes! All against say No! What the advantages or disadvantages with this way? Advantage: it is fast. Disadvantage: sometimes one side sounds louder, even if there are fewer people. And again, if you are shy this is not good for you.

After everybody has voted, the ballots are counted to see who got the most votes. This person is the winner. Usually, it's a good idea for someone to watch over the people who are doing the counting. After all, they might make a mistake. They might even cheat on purpose, by counting more votes for the person they like. Often, the people who watch the election will come from a completely different country. This way, they can be especially fair, because they don't know the candidates and they don't like one candidate more than the other. Their only job is to see that the election is honest.

During the last election for the President of the United States, one part of the country had a problem with its ballots, and all of the votes had to be counted a second time. People from everywhere came to watch over this, to make sure the counting was fair.
What is a quota?

A game or a race — and a political election — is fair if everyone has the same chance to win. But what if one person is at a disadvantage? If you still want to have a game or a race, you have to do something to make things fairer.

A head start in a race

Let's say that Toryelay wants to have a race with his cousin Khaled. But Khaled is wearing sandals, and he can't run as well in his sandals as Toryelay can run in his sport shoes. They decide that, to make things more even, Khaled can run a shorter race than Toryelay: he can have a head start.

In elections, a ‘quota’ is like this head start. If a group is at a disadvantage, and wouldn’t have the same chance as others, then there are things we can do to make the situation fairer.

In politics today, women continue to have some disadvantages.

- Women are still new to the process, and don’t know how ‘the game’ works as well as the men do, who have been doing it for a long time.
- Men have strong networks of other men who will help them, fight for them, support them, give them money and applaud for them. Women don’t have such networks yet.
- It's often harder for women to stand up in public and speak. They feel shy, and are afraid that people might disapprove of a woman who gets herself noticed.
- Women have a lot of responsibilities at home and with their children, which makes it hard for them to find enough time to do political work, go to meetings, and travel around making speeches.
- Sometimes their family does not encourage them, and might even try to stop them. But the family of a man is often proud of him when he gets involved in politics, and helps him.
- Some voters are still prejudiced against women. They prefer to vote for a man, without considering that the woman might be better qualified and might do a better job.

But let's not forget that women also have some advantages:

- People often trust them more, and think they will be more honest.
- Because they aren’t part of the networks, they are more independent.
- They are often closer to real life, and know what their fellow citizens want and need.
- Often, they are especially brave and strong individuals — they have to be, to have the courage to overcome all of the discouragement and difficulties put in their way.
What do you think?

Do you think these are real problems facing women who want to be involved in politics in Afghanistan? Have you heard people say negative things about a woman who is outspoken? Can you think of other handicaps a woman faces that we can add to this list?

However, the disadvantages are quite serious. Therefore, many countries have invented ways to make things fairer. Some countries use what is called a zebra principle. A zebra is an animal like a horse, but it has black and white stripes. In politics, this means that all lists of candidates have to be 'striped' like the zebra — but instead of alternating black and white, the list has to alternate men and women. For every man who is on the list, a woman has to follow as the next candidate. This means that when the election is over, half of the winners will be men and half will be women. This is done in Sweden.

Other countries set a quota — a certain amount of seats which must be reserved for women. In France and in South Africa, 50% of candidates in local elections must be women. In Norway, the Labor Party set a 40% quota for women. In Tanzania, 20% of national seats and 25% of local government seats are reserved. In India, it's 33% at the local government level.

In March 2004, Spanish voters elected a new government. During the campaign, the Socialist Party promised that if they were elected, half of their cabinet would be women — and they won. That means that many men and women agreed with their idea.

The constitution of Afghanistan states that there must be an average of 2 seats per province reserved for women, adding up to 25% at the national level. This was decided at the loya jirga, as a way of making things more fair for women. The people voting in favor of this, were mostly men. They did this because they wanted a true democracy, which is fair to all citizens and does not exclude half of the population.

What is campaigning, networking and lobbying?

Imagine there is a matter that is very important to you, your family, your neighbourhood, your village or some other group you belong to. You really want a particular decision to go your way! For example, let's say that the local government has some money for rural development, and your village really needs clean water. You want some of this money to be spent on a new well for the school and the clinic in your village. In order to influence a decision in your favor, you must persuade others to support you. There are three different kinds of people whom you might need to persuade:
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1. People who would benefit from this decision

You would need to inform them about it and persuade them to speak out in public or to vote in the correct manner to achieve this thing that you want. Maybe the people in your village don’t know about the money for rural development – you have to give them the information. Perhaps they know, but they are discouraged and think it is hopeless to even ask for it, because your village will not get it anyway – then you have to mobilize them. Giving them information, getting them to support your idea and encouraging them to be active in order to make this idea happen is called campaigning. You can campaign for a person, or you can campaign for an idea. The person you campaign for can be yourself, or some politician you believe in.

2. People who are not directly affected by the thing you want...

...but who might support you because they are your friends, and because the next time, you might support them! Obviously, the more people of this kind that you know, the better your chances of success. However, you can’t wait until the day before you need help to start developing these kinds of friendships. You must build them over time. This is called networking. In networking, you do exactly what this word suggests – you build a net of relationships with people who can be helpful to you in the future, and to whom you in turn can also be helpful. There are different kinds of help. Some people might be able to give you information. Some might have influence. Some can give you good advice about special matters that you don’t know very much about. Others can give you their vote, or their voice in a meeting, where they can speak out on your behalf.

3. People who are in a position to make a decision

If you want them to decide in a way that is favourable to you, you have to do several things. You have to let them know what you want. You have to persuade them that this is a good thing, and that many other people want it, too. You have to convince them that it will be good for them if they support this thing – because people will admire them for it, or will vote for them in the next election, etc. This process of speaking with people who have some sort of power or influence and trying to convince them, is called lobbying.

Things that improve your chance of getting what you want:

- many people are asking for it, not just you alone.
- you are not only asking for it, but can give good reasons why it is the right thing to do.
- there will be some good consequences for the person in charge, if they say yes.
- there will be some bad consequences for them, if they say no.

Women lobbying together

Even though women are numerically the majority of society, in politics they are usually a minority, often a small minority. If they cooperate with each other, they will have a lot more power than if they each try to operate alone. If there are 15 women and they are asking for 15 different things, they will not make a very
important impression. If some of the things they are asking for are opposite to each other, they will be erasing each other. But if they can get together and agree on the three most important things they all want, they will have a better chance of success.

**What do you think?**

Think about some problem you have recently had. Did you talk about your problem with others? Did you find someone or something to help you? Did you ask someone for advice? Think about the last time you knew someone else with a problem. Did you comfort them? Did you try to help them? Did you have a skill that you could teach them? Did you have an idea that solved the problem?

There are different types of support networks. They can be very small between individuals in a small area, like a family. They can be large and organized, like a national organization, for example the Red Crescent Society. With telephones, television and computers, networks can even connect people across the world. Being part of a network of people with similar goals, ideas and problems can help an individual get information and support.

TakingITGlobal ([www.takingitglobal.org](http://www.takingitglobal.org)) is a worldwide network of young people, with many members from Islamic countries. Fifty young Afghans are already part of the network. The members share ideas and hopes, and advice about things that have worked for them in school and business.

**What you can do!**

For information about women political leaders from all over the world, see [www.guide2womenleaders.com](http://www.guide2womenleaders.com). This internet website was made by a man in Denmark, Martin Christensen. We sent him an e-mail to ask about his website and to find out what gave him the idea to collect such information. Here is what he replied to us:

"I am glad that you can use my website to help encourage Afghan women to participate in the democratic process.

"I have been interested in women in power for a number of years - as a child I read about Catherine the Great, Empress of Russia, about Maria-Theresa, Empress of Austria and others. I was fascinated by them, how they could cope in a very male environment.

"I studied history and collected information about the women. I found out that there were many more than one realizes, and when I learned about the internet, I took the chance of creating a website, so that more people could share the information."
WOMEN’S SUFFRAGE MAP OF THE WORLD
Women's Suffrage Map of the World

Here is a selection of countries where women gained full suffrage. That means the year women were granted the right both to vote and to stand for election. The countries listed below currently have a parliament or have had one at some point in their history.

1906  Finland
1913  Alaska
1918  Austria, Kyrgyzstan, Russian Federation
1920  Iceland
1924  Tajikistan, Mongolia
1927  Turkmenistan
1928  United Kingdom
1930  South Africa (whites)
1934  Brazil, Cuba, Turkey
1937  Philippines
1938  Uzbekistan
1947  Argentina, Japan, Pakistan, Singapore
1949  People's Republic of China
1955  Cambodia, Peru
1962  Australia, Uganda
1963  Afghanistan, Kenya
1970  Yemen
1971  Switzerland
1974  Jordan
1984  South Africa (coloreds and Indians)
1994  South Africa (blacks)

Women in Kuwait do not yet have the right to vote or to stand for election. In the United Arab Emirates, where Parliament is officially appointed, neither men nor women have the right to vote or to stand for election.
CHAPTER TWO: WOMEN AND POLITICS IN THE MODERN WORLD

One of the sad but true facts about human beings is that people who become powerful do not always want to share their power. As a result of this, people have to stand up for their rights themselves. Waiting until those who are more powerful decide to be fair to you and give you your share and your rights does not work.

This is true for anyone who is in a weaker position. It is true if you belong to a race or an ethnic group that is in the minority. And throughout history, it has generally been true for women.

We just said that human beings have the habit of enjoying power and trying to hold on to it, at the expense of others. But that is not the whole story. Fortunately, human beings also have a strong belief in fairness and equality. Many people, including some who belong to the stronger side, believe in justice, and take the side of those who are weaker and who are being treated unfairly. There are different reasons why they might do this:

- Some do it because of their religious faith. They believe that God stands for justice; that you will be punished if you treat other people unfairly; that everyone is equal, as the Koran says; and that it is an obligation to help others achieve what they deserve.
- Some do it because they believe in democracy and progress. They look at the world around them to see which countries are happy, and which ones are doing badly. They notice that countries in which men and women treat each other in a friendly and respectful way, where women have jobs, and are educated, and in which people are treated fairly and equally, have more prosperity, healthier families, and more peace than countries in which people are oppressed and treated unequally.

Around the world, whenever women tried to get equality and justice they encountered some men — and also some women — who tried to stop and discourage them. However, they also found men and women who encouraged and supported them. In fact, some of the most outspoken leaders in the movement for women's rights in the Islamic world, have been men.

Did you know?

In New Zealand (1893) and Denmark (1915), women received the vote without a struggle. These countries are the exception. In most cases, women had a long and hard journey before they were able to vote and be elected as representatives.

However, this does not mean that things are easy. Almost everywhere in the world, women had to overcome resistance and had to fight for their right to vote, to get a good education, to work and to have equal legal rights.

The constitution of Afghanistan states it clearly: women and men are equal before the law. Both are citizens of their country. Both have the same rights.

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and responsibilities of a citizen. Both can vote and can be voted for. This puts Afghanistan on the same level as the rest of the world’s modern democracies.

Let's look at some of the other countries in the world, to see what women experienced when they tried to get the right to be equal citizens, and to vote. As we are doing this, we will look for patterns.

Many things in this world have a pattern. If you are knitting something, you will follow a pattern. If you are making a carpet, you will follow a pattern. When we look at the history of the different countries in the world, very often we will also be able to see a pattern.

How women in the United Kingdom got the vote

Before 1800, women in the United Kingdom were second-class citizens. When a woman married, everything she owned became her husband’s property. Women did not have careers, go to university or practice law or medicine. Women could not vote or become Members of Parliament.

Did you know?

Under Islamic law, a woman always had the right to control her own property.

During the nineteenth century, in the United Kingdom, things began to change. Over the course of the century, laws were passed to give women more rights within marriage. But women especially wanted one very basic right - the right to vote. The technical term for the right to vote is “suffrage”. Therefore, women who fought for this right became known as the suffragettes.

Arguments at the time why women should not receive the right to vote were:

- Women did not have the right kind of mind to be able to make such complicated decisions, and they didn’t have enough experience with how the world works.
- Women were too gentle, kind and innocent – politics was a dirty business, and would only upset them.
- Women would not make their own decisions. They just would vote the way their husband told them to. This would be unfair to unmarried men – a married man would basically get two votes, his own and that of his wife, but an unmarried man would only have one vote.

The arguments in favor of women receiving the vote were:

- If women had to obey the laws, then women should be part of the process of making those laws.
- Maybe if more women were involved, politics would not be such a dirty business.
CHAPTER TWO: WOMEN AND POLITICS IN THE MODERN WORLD

- Women were just as affected as men by political decisions, so they should be able to be a part of making them. For example, in a war women suffered as much as the men.
- Because women were different from men, they would bring in new ideas, and new ideas make for better decisions.

Those who are against equality usually do four kinds of things to discourage and stop women:

1. they make fun of them
2. they try to scare them
3. they say bad things about them to hurt their reputation
4. sometimes they even use force

The opponents of women's rights in the United Kingdom used these methods. They made fun of the women. They insulted them and ignored them. They tried to scare them by putting them in jail. And they used violence against them. The women knew how to defend themselves against this. Instead of feeling insulted by the word suffragettes, they took the name over and were proud of it. If they were ignored, they just said the same thing again, louder. These strategies can slow women down, but they can't stop change from happening! The example of the United Kingdom shows this very clearly.

In the United Kingdom in 1903, a group of women decided that the time had finally come for them to get the vote, and that they would not stop fighting for it until they were successful. Emmeline Pankhurst and her daughter, Christabel, were the two most famous leaders of this group, which was called the Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU).

At first, they tried to get their voting rights in quiet and polite ways. They wrote letters and tried to convince male politicians to let women vote. They published a magazine, in which they explained their reasons why women should be treated fairly and equally. But the politicians in parliament did not take them seriously, and did not respond.

In 1905, there was going to be a General Election. The political parties were organizing meetings and rallies all across the country, to persuade the voters – all men – to vote for them. When a political party is trying to get elected, it tells people about its political platform – the list of things it believes in. None of the political parties mentioned voting rights for women as being part of their platform.

The suffragettes went to these meetings. Usually, at the end of the meeting, members of the audience were invited to ask questions. On one particular evening, one of the members of the WSPU raised her hand and asked, "Will the Liberal party give votes to women?"

The speakers ignored her and did not even give her an answer. One of her friends repeated the question. Some of the men in the audience laughed at her. The man who was the main speaker smiled and did not answer. This made
BRITISH AND AMERICAN SUFFRAGETTES

1 Emily Pankhurst, UK
2 Alice Paul, USA
3 Women march for their rights in America 1922
4 Suffragette supporters in England c. 1917
5 Suffragette banner "VOTES FOR WOMEN"
the women angry, so one of them got up on a chair and shouted her question again, "Will the Liberal Government give women the vote?" The police came and removed her from the hall. But she and her friends still did not give up. They organized a protest outside the hall. They were arrested. But what happened next was a surprise. It turned out that ordinary people had a lot of sympathy for the women and for the idea that women should be allowed to vote. Hundreds of men and women sent letters to the newspaper, supporting what the women were doing.

This encouraged the women to start organizing marches. In 1906, hundreds of women held a large demonstration in London. They tried to march up to the Parliament and speak to the politicians, but they were arrested instead. However, their bravery was starting to really impress people. Some men politicians began to show support for them. The Home Secretary even gave a speech in favor of votes for women. After that, there was an even bigger demonstration, the biggest one that had ever been seen in England. Seven separate marches took place, and the crowds who watched them joined in, shouting "Votes for Women, Votes for Women." The government accepted the marchers' resolution demanding immediate voting rights for women – but they still didn't approve it.

A week later 100,000 women gathered outside Parliament. The conservatives in the Parliament reacted negatively. They announced that they would not even debate the issue of women's votes. They said they might discuss it in a few years, but not now. This made the women very angry, and some of their demonstrations became more violent. They threw stones and fought with police. The leaders of the suffragettes were arrested, and some had to flee to another country, France, to lead the movement from there.

Did you know?

Which was the first country in Europe to give women the right to vote? That country was Finland.

In 1906, Finnish women became the first in Europe to have the right to vote and to stand for elected office. In the parliament election held in the following year almost ten percent of the seats were won by women!

How did the Finnish women achieve such an early victory in the fight for the right to vote? One reason was due to their participation in working life. Another reason was that Finnish women were very active in religious, social, health and educational organizations. This activity gave them experience in political life. Women's organizations were also active in issues such as labor protection, the protection of children and maternity care, and they fought against prostitution and alcoholism.

Finnish women are well represented in the parliament, where over one third of parliamentarians are women. Like France, Finland also has a female Minister of Defense. Her previous job? The Minister of Equality Affairs.

By this time many ordinary people, and most of the newspapers and journalists, were on the side of the suffragettes. When the suffragettes went on hunger strikes, people became very upset and the politicians were worried. They knew
that the public would blame them if any of the jailed women died during their hunger strike. They ordered them to be released from prison.

Then World War One broke out, and ordinary politics were interrupted. Everybody concentrated on defending their country. Millions of women took jobs, replacing the men who were going to war. They performed very difficult work in military factories, offices and on farms – the kinds of work that before, people believed would be too difficult for women and could only be done by men. Now, the women proved that they could do it just as well. The help of the women was so important that afterwards, nobody could ever say again that women were weak, or that they could not work exactly as well and do the same things as men. In 1918, women finally received the vote, and the right to be elected into parliament.

**What you can do!**

What are some patterns here? One pattern is that advances follow setbacks. In politics, you prove your seriousness by persistence. If one approach does not work, you must try another. In a democracy, if you are serious enough, and you can mobilize enough people to keep demanding something for long enough, loudly enough, eventually you will get it.

We also learn from this example that we have to be persistent. Maybe you can change the world just by asking someone nicely, one time. But usually, it will require more trouble than that. Usually, you will have to keep trying in many different ways, for a long time. Usually people will listen to you if it is more trouble to ignore you than to listen. If it is easy to ignore you, then they will.

In a later chapter, we will look at some of the different ways to influence political decisions. You won’t have to throw stones or get arrested! There are plenty of other things you can do. Every political movement needs different kinds of people. It needs some who are very brave – who are even willing to go to jail for their beliefs. It also needs some who are more cautious. Everyone is needed: those who march in the demonstrations and those who stand on the sidelines, encouraging them by waving. Those who are ready to be arrested, and those who stay at home but write a letter to the newspaper in support of the activists.

Everyone must decide for herself how brave she can be, how many risks she can take. Even if you want to be very careful, there is still a lot that you can do, and you are still important.

**How the women in the United States got the vote**

American women did not become active in politics just to get more rights for themselves. They became active because there were important social issues that they felt strongly about but were unable to influence without having a political voice. This was in the 19th Century, 200 years ago.

One of the issues these women cared about deeply was the question of slavery. They believed that it was wrong to keep other human beings as slaves. But in those days, it was permitted in the United States to keep black people as slaves. These women believed in equality - not only between men and women, but also between black people and white people.
Another issue women cared about at this time was temperance, which means the belief that alcohol should be forbidden. Alcohol misuse in those days was destroying many families. Many men would receive their paycheck, then go to a bar and spend the entire month's salary getting drunk. There would be no money left for food for their wife and children. Many women therefore believed that alcohol should be prohibited.

Whatever the issue that was important to them, women found that they had no influence over the laws, and that politicians did not listen to them because they could not vote.

Women tried many different things to achieve the right to vote. They held a large meeting in Seneca Falls to discuss their strategies, and to get publicity for their plan. They published magazines and collected petitions and signatures. They organized marches and demonstrations. They gathered outside the White House, where the U.S. President lives and works, holding signs demanding the right to vote. Some of the women chained themselves to the White House fence so police could not send them away.

Beginning in 1878, the rule that would have allowed women to vote was presented to the American Congress during each session. It was denied many times. Each time it was denied, the women did not give up. Instead, they immediately worked to get it presented again. Finally, it passed.

Just as in England, World War I was a turning point for American women, too. Women played such an important and active role, helping to defend their country and efficiently replacing men in factories and the workplace, that it just wasn't possible any more to say that they were less capable than men. American women received the right to vote only in summer 1920, more than 40 years after the rule was first presented to Congress.

Did you know?

Women as Heads of State

Currently, 25 countries in the world have a woman as their head of state. Traditionally, women are often appointed to be Minister of Health or Minister of Education. However, since 1960, there have also 46 women Ministers of Defense. Since 1947, 85 women have served as Minister of Foreign Affairs. This includes countries that are neighbors of Afghanistan: Pakistan has had women Ministers of Defense, and of Atomic Energy. Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan have had women Ministers of Foreign Affairs.

Some of the countries currently under the leadership of a woman are: the Philippines, Ireland, Peru, Panama, Bermuda, Sao Tome, Indonesia, Latvia, and Bangladesh. Some of these are small countries. Latvia has a population of 2.5 million. Some are very large. Bangladesh has a population of 140 million, Indonesia of 240 million. You can see some of these leaders in a picture in this handbook.

Nine countries are represented in the United Nations by women ambassadors:

- Finland
- Guinea
- Jamaica
- Kazakhstan
- Kyrgyzstan
- Liberia
- Liechtenstein
- Somalia
- Turkmenistan
Women As Heads of State
What do you think?

Worldwide, fewer women than men tend to vote. What do you think would happen if women began to vote in equal proportion to men? Do you think women's vote would significantly change national policies? Would women worldwide vote differently than men? Why or why not? Afghanistan also passed through years of war. Did Afghan women perform responsibilities previously assigned to men? What are some examples? Did they receive recognition and credit for this, in the same way that British and American women did? Why or why not?

If you were in favour of women's right to vote, what arguments would you use? If you were against women's suffrage, what arguments might you use? Have you heard anyone use these arguments? How might you answer them?

What other social causes were related to the women's suffrage movement in the U.S and the United Kingdom? Which other causes, besides women's rights, do you think are most important to Afghan women?

We've seen already that it takes patience, persistence and courage to build a more equal society. It doesn't happen all at once. The case of Egypt shows us some of the stepping-stones.

Another thing is interesting about this list. It is posted on the internet, as part of the official Egyptian government information service. The Egyptian government is today proud of the advances made by Egyptian women – in fact they are so proud of it, that this is one of the things they like to tell the world about when they introduce their country.

But as you will see when you study the list, at the time, the Egyptian government supported women in some areas such as education, but it opposed their attempts to get legal and political equality.

Did you know?

Women in some countries of Asia and the Middle East won the right to vote earlier than many Western nations: Lebanon (1926); Sri Lanka (1931); Thailand (1932); and the Philippines (1937).

This is often true not only for the case of women, but for all those who work to reform and improve their society and to make it more fair – at the time, many obstacles are put in their way, they are laughed at and problems are caused for them, but afterwards, everybody is so proud of them.
**How women in Egypt got the vote**

1873  
First primary school for girls opened.

1892  
The magazine "Al-Fatât" (Girl), the first women's magazine printed in Egypt, is started in Alexandria by Hind Nawfal.

1888  
Qasim Amin, a great Egyptian reformer and philosopher, publishes "Tahrir Al-Mara'a" (Women's Emancipation).

1901  
Qasim Amin publishes "Al-Mara’a Al-Jadida" (The New Woman).

1908  
Fatima Rashid starts the magazine Majallat Tarqiyat Al-Mara.

1911  
Malak Hifni Nasif, a reformer, presents ten demands to the Egyptian Legislature. All are rejected.

1914  
The Educational Union of Women is founded in Cairo.

1919  
Hoda Sha'rawi leads a demonstration of women in support of Egyptian nationalism. It is the first time women demonstrate. They wear veils.

1919  
Women participate in mixed demonstrations with men.

1921  
The first secondary school for girls is opened.

1923  
Hoda Sha'rawi attends the International Alliance for Women conference in Rome, Italy. She, and the rest of the delegation of Egyptian women, decide to put away their veils. When they return to Egypt, they do not wear the veil anymore. Many other women follow their example.

1924  
A new constitution is approved. It provides that elementary education is to be free and compulsory for girls as well as boys.

1925  
The first girls are sent abroad for advanced degrees.

1926  
"Rose al-Youssef", a political magazine, is founded in Cairo by Fatma al-Youssef, a former actress. It soon becomes the leading weekly news magazine, read by men as well as women.

1928  
The first female students enter Cairo University.

1935  
The Egyptian Feminist Union, founded in 1923, for the first time calls for equal political rights for women.

1937  
The Egyptian Feminist Union publishes its own magazine, Al-Masreyya (The Egyptian Woman).

1938  
The Eastern Feminist Conference meets. The main question of discussion is Palestine.

1945  
The United Nations is founded, and Egypt is a founding member. The League of Arab States is formed, also with Egypt as a founding member.

1948  
Doria Shafik founds a new political party just for women, "Bint Al Nil" (Daughters of the Nile).
1950 Parliamentary elections are held.

1951 There is political unrest. Mobs burn many sections of Cairo. Members of Bint Al Nil occupy parliament briefly, and demand representation for women.

1952 There is a military takeover. The constitution is abolished. Political activity in general is forbidden.

1959 A new constitution is promulgated. It gives women the right to vote.

1961 Most of the private sector of the Egyptian economy is nationalized. Higher education is made free.

1962 Hekmat Abu Zaid becomes the first woman appointed to the Cabinet. She is Minister of Social Affairs.

1970 Anwar Sadat becomes President of Egypt.

1971 Dr. Aisha Rateb becomes Minister of Social Affairs.

1977 Dr. Amal Othman becomes Minister of Social Affairs.

1978 A new law reserves a quota of 30 seats for women in The People's Assembly. At the local government level, between 10% and 20% of seats on local councils are reserved for women. The Personal Status Laws are reformed, giving women more equality in divorce, alimony and child custody. Dr. Aisha Rateb becomes the first woman ambassador appointed by Egypt.

1979 The Shura Consultative Council is formed, including seven women.

1980 President Sadat arrests 1,500 people for political security reasons. This number includes several women.

1985 The Higher Constitutional Court declares the improved Personal Status Laws to be unconstitutional on procedural grounds. Two months later, the People's Assembly passes the same laws again, and this time they stand.

1988 The National Council on Childhood and Motherhood is founded.

1994 Mrs. Mubarak, the wife of the President, becomes chairperson of the National Committee on Women.

1999 A special conference is held to honor the “100th Anniversary of Arab Women's Emancipation”.

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How women in Iran got the vote

As early as the 19th century, Iranian women organized themselves to put women's issues on the political agenda. However, they were denied the right to vote in 1906 when the country obtained its first constitution. Disappointed by this, women began to organize themselves in secret and semi-secret associations, and started to raise funds and establish schools for girls.

In 1932 the country's Patriotic Women's League organized an Oriental Women's Congress in Tehran in 1932. The intention was to discuss with women from Lebanon, Egypt, Iraq, Turkey and India issues such as women's education and the abolition of polygamy.

During the Second World War, the Women's Center and the Women's League appeared on the political scene. Safiyeh Firuz, a long-standing committed women activist, established a women's party in 1942. The party aimed to promote women's legal and social status and raise awareness about women's issues. Fatemeh Sayyah, a leading intellectual and writer on women's concerns, became the party's secretary. She actively lobbied the Iranian Parliament (Majlis) to raise the issue of women's suffrage.

In 1963, Iranian women received their right to vote and be elected in a national referendum. The Women's Organization of Iran took over the role of all the smaller associations. The greatest contribution of the Women's Organization was its successful lobbying for a Family Protection Law, which came into force in 1967 and placed significant limits on polygamous marriage.

After the Islamic revolution of 1979, the Family Protection Law was abolished, women were barred from becoming judges and were forced to wear the hijab in public and at their workplaces. One of the women who had to give up their post as judge was Shirin Ebadi. In 1975, she had been the first female judge in Iran. In 2003, she was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for her support of human rights.

After 1997, some educated women and political activists began to actively campaign for women's issues. They criticised the abolition of the Family Protection Law. They believed that Islamic scholarship had been one-sided, because the religion was only being interpreted from the point of view of men. It was important, they thought, for women to study and interpret the texts for themselves.

Due to their efforts, the Iranian parliament adopted a new Family Law which gave back many of the legal rights to women. Another success was the passing of the "wages for household" law in 1992. This law gave women the right to receive payment for their labor from their husbands should they ask for divorce. Also, women were again allowed to be judges.

In political life, Iranian women have been elected to all four parliaments. In the parliamentary election of 1996, 179 women were announced as final candidates for 84 districts.

Female voters are strong participants in the elections of the Islamic Republic of Iran. They played a decisive role in electing President Khatami.
The link between political rights and business

Across the Arab world, there is a definite link between women gaining more political rights and the increase in women's participation in business. In October 2002, for the first time ever, the Gulf state of Bahrain allowed women to vote and run for national office.

At the same time, women's business networks have mushroomed across the Middle East. Arab first ladies such as Suzanne Mubarak of Egypt and Queen Rania in Jordan, who also helped form the Arab Women's Organization, support these networks.

There has been a quiet but dramatic shift in Arab attitudes over the last two or three years. "Now it is very politically correct to address women's issues," says Haifa Fahoum Al Kaylani, chair of the Arab International Women's Forum in London. "It is like a competition between Arab governments to encourage women to enter business and the political process."

The rise of this women's movement has been partly due to investment in education by Arab rulers in the 1970s. The literacy rate for women in the Arab world has since tripled, while school education rates have doubled. In Bahrain last year, women held more university degrees than men. Even in Saudi Arabia, the government is creating jobs for women as part of its economic strategy.

In Bahrain, Mona Yousuf Al Moayyed, the first woman to be elected to the board of the Bahraini Chamber of Commerce and Industry, is one of the region's role models. She is managing director of a family trading business, called Y.K. Almoayyed, which experienced 20% growth last year. She manages 1,000 people. Regulations in Bahrain guarantee women's right to work and they treat them as equal to men. The number of women in Bahrain's labor force increased from just over 5% in 1971 to almost 40% last year.

There have been recent political movements in many Arab countries to expand women's political rights.

In Qatar, women were allowed to vote and run for office in the country's first municipal elections last March. Oman's Emir last year included two women in the Consultative Council, while Bahrain selected its first woman ambassador. However, women often don't vote for each other when they are able, such as in the Qatar election last year. Women were permitted to vote and run for office for the first time.

In Kuwait, the struggle for female suffrage continues today. Kuwait is the only country in the world where men can vote, but women are still denied this right!

Although political freedom is being withheld from them, women in Kuwait have made advances wherever they could. They can drive and travel, and they work in almost every field. More than a third of the workforce in Kuwait is now female, and in the universities and schools their performance is significantly better than that of the men. This makes employers prefer to hire women.

Women in Kuwait are among the highest educated in the Arab world. Forty-one percent of all graduates from Kuwait University are women.
Some of the positions held by individual women in Kuwait are: the Director of the University of Kuwait, the Kuwaiti Ambassadors to Austria and to Zimbabwe, the Undersecretary of Higher Education, and the head of the Kuwaiti News Agency.

How is it that women in Kuwait have achieved so much in these other areas of public life, but yet still do not have the right to vote? It isn’t because they don’t want to, or haven’t tried.

**Women in Kuwait – still working to get the vote**

The women in Kuwait are still not able to vote. As early as the 1950s, Kuwaiti women organized demonstrations. In 1971, a conference on women’s issues was held in Kuwait. It resulted with a bill being submitted to the country’s National Assembly asking for women’s rights. The bill was defeated, but this did not prevent Kuwaiti women to repeat this action in 1981, 1986, 1992 and 1996.

**What do you think?**

Do you think women in Kuwait will be more politically active once they achieve their rights because they had to fight for them in comparison to other countries where women take these rights for granted?

What are some similarities between the Kuwaiti women and the British women? Should you give up if you are not successful the first, second, or even third time you try to demand your rights?

Women normally comprise 50% of the population. Why doesn’t this translate into 50% of the seats won? Would you vote for a female if she was a good candidate?

Would you consider running for office yourself? Why or why not? Under what circumstances? If you did, what issues would be the most important to you? Is there a law you would like to pass?

When in 1990 the Iraqi army occupied Kuwait, Kuwaiti women organized protest demonstrations only two days after the beginning of the occupation. They also participated actively in the underground struggle against the occupiers and some paid for this with their lives. After the liberation of Kuwait, many expected that women would gain the right to vote, but it did not happen.

This does not mean that they were without supporters. In 1999, the head of state Sheikh Jabar himself issued a decree giving women voting rights. This was welcomed by Kuwaiti women and praised by Arab and Islamic countries such as Egypt, Iran, Pakistan and Indonesia. Seven women announced their plans to run for Parliament in 2003.

However, the Kuwaiti parliament rejected this bill. They also defeated a similar initiative later in the year by a narrow majority of 32 against 30 votes. Several Kuwaiti women decided to bring lawsuits against the decision, but Kuwait’s highest judicial instance, the Constitutional Court, rejected the cases due to a technical reason. Later appeals were also rejected without giving any reasons.
Kuwaiti women continued their fight for the right to vote and to be elected. On 1 February 2000, the first day of the annual voter registration period, hundreds of women marched to the registration centres and demanded to be registered as voters. When they were rejected, they again filed lawsuits against the government. None of these complaints were accepted. On 28 October of the same year, the women organised a public demonstration in front of the National Assembly to ask for a change to the election law. “We invade the registration centers, and then we file cases because they don’t allow us in,” explains Zainab al-Harbi, a leader of the main organization that campaigns for women’s suffrage, the Women's Cultural and Social Society.

The refusal to give women the right to vote is against Kuwait’s 1961 Constitution, which says that the government shall be democratic and ensure equal opportunities for citizens. Kuwait has also ratified the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR). Fatima al-Abdali, the head of the Women’s Issues Committee, has spent the last ten years campaigning for Kuwaiti women’s rights to vote and to hold office. “They tell us it’s not the right time, as though they have a chart of the right time. You’ll never find the whole society facing in one direction. If you wait for that time, it will never come.”

Some observers believe that Kuwait is not really a democracy, anyway. Women can’t vote – but the rules about which men can vote are so strict that out of a population of nearly one million people there are only 113,000 voters in the whole country!

**What you can do!**

Would you like to express your support to the women of Kuwait, who do not have the same political rights that you do? Then you can send a letter to the Kuwaiti embassy. If you put a return address you might receive a reply. The nearest Kuwaiti embassy is in Pakistan. Your letter can say something like this:

**Embassy of Kuwait, 1,2,24 Diplomatic Enclave, University Road Islamabad, Pakistan**

Dear Ambassador Alwadi:

As we prepare to vote in the Afghan elections, we are sad that our Kuwaiti sisters do not have the same democratic rights that we women here in Afghanistan enjoy.

Please convey to them our expression of sympathy and our hope that they, too, will soon be able to live in a democracy that respects their equal human rights.

Respectfully,

(sign with your name, or the name of your group, or with a list of signatures of all group members who would like to sign)
Afghanistan’s place in the story of women’s suffrage

The new constitution

As of 4 January 2004, Afghanistan has a new Constitution which provides that women and men “are equal before the law”. This includes equal political rights such as the right to vote and the right to be elected.

The constitution states that Afghanistan will be led by a president who is to be elected directly by the people. The parliament will be made up of two houses, the House of Elders and the House of People. Members to the House of People will be directly elected.

Did you know?

Recently, a group of 12 organizations went around to talk to Afghans all over the country, and ask them their views about politics, democracy, and the role of women. Here is what they learned:

- Most Afghans are very positive and hopeful about democracy and elections. They want Afghanistan to be part of the modern world.
- In general, both Afghan men and Afghan women were well informed about political events in the country. 70% knew that elections were going to be held. Of those, 87% planned to vote in the elections. 73% thought that having a national election would be good for the country.
- 72% thought that women should be involved in making decisions about their community and their country, not only about things in their family. Only 17% thought they should not.

The organizations that were asking the questions in this survey also asked people WHY they thought this. Why did they think women should be involved? They were given two reasons.

- First, because this is the natural right of women, given to them by Islam.
- Second, because they are half the population and therefore have the right to participate in the life of their society.

The survey found big differences among the different parts and regions of Afghanistan. These differences are especially obvious when it comes to the question of women’s role and women’s rights. Most of the people who did NOT think women had the same right to participate, lived in Gardez, Zaranj and Kandahar. In Gardez and Zaranj, only half the people who were asked thought that women should participate.

The survey found that education made a big difference to people’s opinions. Those who had been to school and were more educated were more likely to believe that women should participate. People who were not educated more often thought that women should not take part.

One out of every four (25%) of the seats in the House of People are reserved for women. Women can also stand for election for an unreserved seat. There is no top limit to how many women can be elected.

As we can see when we compare this with some of the other stories we just read, it looks as if the women of Afghanistan now have a good starting point.
They don't have to fight for the right to vote. With 25% guaranteed seats, they have a head start to make up for the difficulties they can otherwise expect to face.

*What do you think?*

What do people believe in the area where you live? What would be the opinions of some of your neighbors, concerning these questions?

**What is an opinion poll?**

Political leaders and politicians are supposed to represent the people of their country. Newspaper journalists are supposed to write things that will interest the people who buy the newspaper. Radio programs should contain things that people like to listen to.

But how can politicians, journalists, radio announcers and others know what people like, what they want and what they are interested in? Can they just guess?

One way for them to get information about the thinking of the population is through opinion polls. It takes too long and is too difficult and too expensive to ask everybody their opinion. So we ask some people. However we can’t ask just anybody — or we might get the completely wrong impression. Probably you have a relative whose opinion is usually different from that of everybody else. Imagine if the opinion poll asked only that relative?

For an opinion poll, we have to choose a group that represents the whole country. We have to choose people from different parts of Afghanistan – from Herat and Mazar-i-Sharif, not just from Kabul. We have to choose people from big cities, little towns and villages. We have to talk to old people and to young people, to men and to women. The group we talk to is called a sample. For example, let’s say you wanted to find out what the women in a particular village like to hear on the radio. You will need to think about what kind of women live in your village. How many are young, middle aged, or old? You shouldn’t just ask the young ones, but you should make sure to talk to some in each age group.

The study we told you about went all over the country to talk to people. They talked to people who were literate and people who were illiterate, to young people and old ones, to women and men.

**Afghan women go to register so that they can vote in the elections**

"Afghans have been quick to understand the importance of elections for their future, and some groups have held rallies to promote female registration. Some registration centers overflowed with women eager to sign up to vote for the first time. Families helped grandmothers climb schoolroom steps to put their thumbprints on voter ID cards."
"We came because we want to vote for a proper government and a fair president. It is our right now," said Gul Alai, 35, a housewife who had just signed up to vote in the Taimony district of Kabul.

"I came here because I want to vote for peace and security," said Khanum Gul, 55, pulling the cover down over her face as she emerged from the registration hall. "We had nothing but war for so long. Now, I just want to have a normal life, where my daughters can go to school and work and not have to stay home anymore."

This was taken from a newspaper report; the Washington Post, Feb. 2004

What do you think?

The above report talks about three women who are going to register. One of them is an old lady, and her family is proud to be helping her take part in this big moment in the country's history. Which member of your family, or which one of your friends, might feel proud when they go to vote?

The second and third women tell us a little about why they want to vote, and what is important to them. Are these things that are also important to you? What would you say if someone asked you what you care about the most? Or if they asked what kind of a government you want?

In the past, Afghanistan has been part of great empires. As part of the route of the famous Silk Road, it was at the very center of international commerce. In the modern era, however, Afghanistan has been a very poor country.

Recently, a group of Arab scholars conducted a careful study to look for the reasons why the Middle East and the Muslim countries beyond are suffering from so much poverty and underdevelopment. They found three things that are necessary if a society is to grow and prosper:

1. There must be political justice and people must be free to say their opinions and to express themselves culturally in art and media.

2. There must be a good education system that prepares young people for practical life.

3. Women have to be able to participate in public life and society, and to have good health and education.

Why are these three things so important? The first one is necessary to make sure that a country is governed in the best interest of its people, that its resources are fairly divided, and that its culture remains alive and vibrant. The second one is necessary if you want to have a productive economy: smart citizens who can solve the problems of their own families, their own lives, and their country. The third is necessary, too. If women are not healthy and if they are forced to marry at a very young age then their children will not be healthy and many of them will not live. If women are not educated, they will not know how to raise healthy, intelligent children. If women do not have jobs, half of the income of a country and a family is lost. If women don't have political rights, there can be no democracy.
CHAPTER TWO: WOMEN AND POLITICS IN THE MODERN WORLD

What you can do!

If you want to know more about women in history who fought for their rights, you could read about them on the internet at these addresses. These sites are in the English language; perhaps you know some other ones you can add to the list.

www.britannica.com/women/articles/woman_suffrage.html
www.rochester.edu/SBA/timeline1.html
http://lcweb2.loc.gov/ammem/naw/nawtime.html
www.womeninworldhistory.com/factLesson4.html
www.australianpolitics.com/voting/franchise/women.shtml
www.europarl.eu.int/enlargement/briefings/26a3_en.htm

These are three important things you need if you want your country to experience progress and prosperity.

However, not everybody wants progress and prosperity. Some people would rather have other things:

- Power for themselves
- Power for their particular ethnic or political group
- Wealth only for themselves
- A world where men can feel more important and valuable than women, and where women have no say

Also, when things change, some people become afraid. They're not sure the change will be good. They are afraid of losing things that are important to them. They might be afraid of losing their place in society.

If we look at earlier attempts to improve the situation of Afghanistan, we will find that these two groups described above were the ones who fought against efforts to reform the country and to repair its problems. Reforms were opposed by:

- those who didn't care if things were bad for most people, as long as they were good for them, and
- those who were afraid of the changes.

As we already learned, Afghan women have some important advantages compared to women in other countries. Instead of having to fight hard for their rights, they have repeatedly received their rights without a struggle, because someone who happened to be in power believed that this was the right thing to do.

However, they also have repeatedly lost these rights, when whoever was in power and had given them these rights was overthrown. This pattern reveals a very serious disadvantage faced by Afghan women. In Afghanistan, the question of women, their place in society and how many rights they should have, has usually gotten tangled up with other issues that people were fighting over. Instead of being treated as what they are – half of the population, with rights and interests and problems of their own – women have usually been treated as a symbol.
Like two cats fighting over a mouse, groups that fought against each other in Afghanistan almost always fought over the question of how women should be treated. It isn’t good to be a mouse, pulled apart by two cats. Usually, no matter which cat wins, the result will be bad for the mouse.

The big challenge for Afghan women is how to stop being the mouse that other people play with and to think for themselves about their interests and the kind of life and world they want. They must begin to take charge of their own political fate.

While they received basic democratic rights without having to struggle for them, the “pattern” tells us that they will probably have to fight to have these rights become real, instead of just remaining on paper. For example, child marriage and forced marriages were outlawed almost 40 years ago, but they continued to be practiced. For the law and the constitution to become a real and living part of a country, the people must understand their rights and claim them.

**Important changes for women in the modern history of Afghanistan**

1885 King Abdurrahman introduces legal reforms that improve the status of women. He abolishes the custom of levirate marriage (where a widow is forced to marry her deceased husband’s brother), raises the age of marriage, and gives women a limited right to initiate divorce.

1901 King Habibullah continues with further reforms. He prohibits the practice of overly expensive weddings, which are ruining many families. His wives stop wearing the veil in order to encourage other women to do this also, if they want to.

1919 King Amanullah and his wife, Queen Soraya, are interested in what other countries have done to make their societies more equal, modern and prosperous. They are especially fascinated by Turkey, where Kemal Ataturk is achieving enormous changes. They decide to follow this example. King Amanullah creates a constitutional monarchy. He outlaws slavery and forced labor.

**Queen Soraya’s speech, 1926**

“Do not think that our nation needs only men to serve it. Women should also take their part, as women did in the early years of Islam. The valuable services rendered by women are recounted throughout history, from which we learn that women were not created solely for pleasure and comfort. From their examples we learn that we must all contribute toward the development of our nation, and that this cannot be done without being equipped with knowledge.”

He forms an elected assembly and a modern new system of laws and courts. He introduces mandatory and free education for both girls and boys. Queen Soraya sponsors schools, such as the Malalai Lycee. Her mother and sister also participate in
these efforts. She starts a social welfare organization, Anjuman-i-Himayat-Niswan.

1959 King Zahir Shah announces that women are not obliged to stay in purdah or wear a chaddri, but that this is to be voluntary. He builds girls' schools and hospitals for women. He sends them abroad to be educated as nurses.

1964 The new Afghan constitution gives women the right to vote and the right to be educated. Four women are elected to the first parliament. A woman becomes Minister of Health: she founds the first women's weekly magazine, Irshad-i-Niswan.

1965 The first women's organization is formed, the Democratic Organization of Afghan Women. Its main goals are to eradicate illiteracy among women, ban forced marriages, and eliminate the bride price.

1979-89 The Soviet Union occupies Afghanistan. Five million Afghans flee the country and become refugees in Pakistan, Iran and many other countries.

1992 The Mujahedeen, having driven out the Russians with the help of the United States, enter Kabul. Before they come, women are 40% of Kabul's doctors, 70% of teachers, 50% of civil servants, and 50% of university students. This changes completely. Women were forced to cover their heads and to wear shalwar. Soon, civil war breaks out again. Life becomes miserable and insecure, especially for women, and due to insecurity many women are obliged to leave their jobs and sit at home.

1996 The Taliban enter Kabul. Initially, people are hopeful that they will bring peace. However, their interpretation of Islam restricts the life of women more than ever before. They close girls schools and stop women from working outside. All women were forced to wear chadari and not to appear in public without a male relative. Music and entertainment are banned and women are banned from many ordinary activities. Irreplaceable parts of Afghanistan's rich history are destroyed, including the Bamiyan Buddhas. The Northern Alliance fights to prevent them from taking over the entire country.

2001 The US-led forces enter Afghanistan and the Taliban leadership loses all power. Various Afghan factions meet in Bonn, Germany, to create an Interim Government. Several women participate in this conference, and the interim government includes two women ministers. The Bonn Agreement decides on a plan which will lead to an independent Afghan democracy. Women are part of each step of this plan.

2003-04 200 women delegates attend the Emergency Loya Jirga. A woman is elected Vice-Chair of the Loya Jirga. Another woman, Dr. Massouda Jalal, runs for the position of President. She gives a speech which is greatly applauded by the audience, and she receives over 300 votes, more than any of the other candidates challenging the current president. The current cabinet includes four women who have the rank of a minister. The Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission includes five women and is chaired by a woman. Two women lawyers take part in the commission which drafts the Afghan constitution.
Famous women in Afghan history

Roxana
When Alexander the Great invaded Central Asia, his armies caused enormous damage, destroying everything in their path. But in 329 BC, they arrived in the kingdom of Bactria – part of what is today called Afghanistan. To save their country, Bactrian princess Roxana and her father Oxyartes negotiated a marriage with him instead. This marriage helped Alexander as well, since it encouraged the people of this region to accept the foreign invader as their leader and not rebel against him.

However, later Alexander decided to use this same method somewhere else. He married another wife, the Persian princess Statira. Roxana was very angry about this. The rivalry between the two women contributed to the downfall of Alexander's empire. After the death of Alexander, the supporters of Statira murdered his mother, his wife Roxana, and their son who was also named Alexander.

Queen Gawhar Shad
At the end of the 14th and the start of the 15th century, this Queen ruled an empire that had its capital in Herat and reached from the Tigris River all the way to China. Her reign lasted for 50 years; the last ten years, after the death of her husband King Shah Rukh, she ruled it alone. Even during his lifetime, she was more interested in governing and more involved in the affairs of the state than her husband, who was the youngest son of Timurlane.

Queen Gawhar Shad gave great support to the arts and to culture, and during her rule, many famous monuments were built and philosophical texts written. Poetry and art flourished at her court. Her son, Ulegh Beg, became a famous scientist and astronomer, as well as becoming the king after her death. She is considered one of the most famous and powerful women in world history. Some of the buildings constructed under her direction can still be seen in Herat today. The five minarets of Herat are all that is left of a huge musalla complex she built, which originally included a mosque, a school, and a mausoleum.

Aisha e-Durrani
Aisha was educated in Arabic literature, Dari, and History by private tutors. She was the special pupil of Timur Shah, and recited her first poems at his court. She became well known because of her writing, but both her son and her father were killed while they were fighting in wars, and most of her poems are sad, reflecting these tragedies.

A school in her name stands in Kabul, and is today being supported by the government of Germany. She died 1235 H./1856.

Malalai
In 1880, during fighting against the British colonial occupation, an Afghan soldier who was carrying the Afghan flag was killed. Malalai took the flag from him and continued to carry it forward. Through her brave act, Malalai became a powerful symbol of resistance against all enemies.
Supporters of the Afghan Women's Movement

1. King Zahir Shah and Queen Homaira
2. King Amir Habibullah and Queen Ulya Janab
3. Flight Attendants on Ariana Airlines
4. Girls high school photograph
5. Queen Gawhar Shah’s monument
6. Army and police officers
7. Bettina Goislard, UNHCR
8. Malalai, women’s magazine
9. Journalist Jamila Mujahed
10. Dr. Sima Simar
11. Loya Jirga delegates
12. President Hamid Karzai receives the Women’s Bill of Rights from NGO leaders.
Rabia Balkhi

Rabia Balkhi was the daughter of one of the Samanid rulers. She loved poetry, which was popular at her parents’ court, and she herself composed poems in Dari and in Arabic. Rabia's brother had a highly educated slave, Bakhtash, and he and Rabia fell in love with each other. They wrote love poems to each other. Rabia loved him so much that she could do nothing else but write poetry for him all day long. However, once their love was discovered, Bakhtash was sent away from court and murdered. When Rabia learned of this, she killed herself. Her final message was a poem written on the wall with her own blood.

Queen Soraya

Soraya came from a politically active family. Her father was Mahmud Beg Tarzi, a famous writer and newspaper editor and an admirer of the reforms of Ataturk. He ensured that his daughter received a good education. She married King Amanullah and became Queen in 1919. She opened the first girls’ school in Afghanistan in 1921; graduates of this school were later sent to Turkey to take degrees in nursing, and upon their return, worked in the first women’s hospital in Kabul.

Bettina Goislard

Bettina was born in France in 1976. She believed strongly in human rights, and after completing her studies, she worked for United Nations High Commission for Refugees or UNHCR, the agency that helps refugees everywhere in the world. In 2002, she came to Afghanistan, to Ghazni. She quickly grew to love the country and its people, making many friends. She helped 50,000 Afghans return home after being refugees. She was a very hard worker, not only doing her job, but also collecting money for schools and hospitals, and the people of Ghazni respected her a lot.

But one day, two former Taliban raced up to her U.N. car on a motorbike, and shot and killed her. Angry passersby caught the men and gave them to the police. Many Afghan people were very sad, and so many came to Bettina’s funeral that there was not enough room for all. The Minister of Interior, Jalali gave the speech at her service and said, “This lady sacrificed her life for our country; she loved Afghanistan more than those who killed her.”

What do you think?

What do you think: These women are very different from each other, and the reasons for which they became known, are also very different. Which one do you admire the most? Why?

If you could write a new ending for the story of Rabia Balkhi, what would it be? You can interrupt her story at any point you want, and write any ending you like. Now imagine that you are Queen Gawhar Shad. You are the ruler of Afghanistan. Everyone listens to you. You can build anything you want. What would you build? What laws would you pass? What things would you change?

Bettina Goislard cared about people who were forced to leave their homes and become refugees. These were the kinds of people she wanted to help. Others care a lot about orphaned children, or the handicapped, or the mentally ill. If you were going to choose a group of people to help, which one would it be?
The Candidate story

Dr. Massouda Jalal – first female presidential candidate in Afghan history

It was a proud moment for Massouda Jalal when she stood as Afghanistan's first female presidential candidate at the Emergency Loya Jirga in June 2002. She had made an incredible journey in such a short time, but she was always sure that she would get there. It began when the district elections were taking place and Massouda told her family she would like to be a candidate. There were only a few days for her to register. Then her husband helped her to make a poster about her, to the houses streets of her

This was the election. Massouda thought: "I have proved my worth. I have stayed here, worked and helped my people in the worst days of their lives. I know their suffering in each and every dimension. If it is a matter of honesty, I shall be trusted." The next day, Massouda won the district election. On the way home, her husband said; "Let me bring you a flower". Massouda in one moment realised her possibilities and said: "You can bring me a flower when I am President of Afghanistan!"

Massouda Jalal was born in Karpisa province. Her father, Tela Mohammad, was head of a factory. She went to elementary school in Karpisa before moving to the capital, where she attended high school and then entered the medical faculty at Kabul University. She became a psychiatrist in 1989 and worked in psychiatry and pediatrics at various hospitals in the city.

Later, she married Faizullah Jalal, who teaches in the law faculty at Kabul University. The couple have three children together. Massouda worked throughout the civil wars and the Taleban regime, and during this time, she became the head of a women's programme for the United Nations. In 1998, she began working as a health adviser for the UN World Food Programme. She was once arrested by the Taleban religious police for working, but was later released with no harm after interventions from her office. Her husband has been a solid ally, sometimes driving her to her places of work for her safety and now acting as her spokesperson. Faizullah Jalal is himself a charismatic supporter of women's rights.

When Massouda presented herself as a presidential candidate at the Emergency Loya Jirga in June 2002, it was quite a surprise. She does not belong to any political party or faction so she stood as an independent candidate. "Even very, very conservative, discriminating people ... are telling me 'Yes, we think that a woman can bring national unity because women were never involved in the conflict,'" she
says. In the time leading up to the Loya Jirga meeting, Massouda worked to gain supporters. She does not pretend that this was easy. There was criticism, and even threatening telephone calls, and her husband was also taunted.

But Massouda did not give up, even when Hamid Karzai approached her to offer her a position in his government if she withdrew her candidacy. She says that she always had it in her heart to be a leader for the right reasons and not for political or personal gain. “I have been thinking about this for 23 years when I see our people suffering, dying of poverty. I would always think, what is our way out of these problems? Now the opportunity has come,” she says. “I am an Afghan woman and I am qualified to be a leader of this country. That is all that matters.”

That day in June 2002, Jalal won praise for her short speech. “I am your sister and if you want me as a leader than I will be your leader,” she said. Although Hamid Karzai gained the most votes, Massouda Jalal came second. She does not regret her efforts. “I wanted to prove Afghan women can be a political force,” she says. “The world will now know that Afghan women have the capacity. It enhances the position of Afghan women. After this, people will take us more seriously.” Massouda Jalal plans to run again as a presidential candidate in the presidential elections scheduled for autumn 2004.
CHAPTER THREE: CIVIL SOCIETY

What is civil society?

Civil society is a difficult term to define because it means different things to different people. It can be described as that part of society that acts between the government and the home, for the benefit of society. Simply put, civil society is when people organize themselves in groups to do something or campaign for an issue they care about.

Examples of groups in civil society include: volunteer and charity groups; parent and teacher associations; senior citizens groups; universities; sports clubs; arts and culture groups; faith groups; workers’ clubs and trades unions; study or research groups; and activist groups. By definition, all such civic groups are non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Civil society can be organized at the local, national and international level. It can be as small as the local group working for better road safety or as large as Oxfam, an international relief organization.

Why do we need government AND civil society?

In every democracy, the people give the government the authority to exercise power on their behalf. The government has many fundamental duties, including defending the independence, national sovereignty and territorial integrity of the country; making sure that all children can go to school; expanding the service of electricity, roads and communications. Even in the most developed countries, governments cannot do everything that they should do. They have to make choices about what to do and where to spend the available money. Sometimes governments make mistakes or cannot work well, or they are not aware of certain needs and problems, or they choose to ignore problems. When this happens people can suffer.

A good government makes fair laws and programs that care for the needs and rights of all. However, in a productive, modern and prospering society, people do not only rely on the government or some other “authority” to do everything for them, to solve all their problems; or to have all the right ideas. No matter how good the government is, how smart the politicians are and how much money the state has, the government cannot possibly do everything. This is especially true for a country like Afghanistan, where the government is not rich, but has an enormous number of things that must be done and built and fixed.

However, civil society cannot function meaningfully when the government does not allow a different point of view from their own. There are many countries around the world who had to gradually build a civil society. For example, those countries which have abandoned socialist and communist regimes after 1989 such as Russia and the eastern European countries and central Asian countries like Kirgystan. Afghanistan is in a similar position because for many years views different from those of the authorities were also not permitted.

Civil society in Afghanistan

Civil society groups can be organizations. The size of these organizations can vary. In Afghanistan, Amnesty International is a big organization with offices
and members all around the world. This organization monitors the situation of people who are suffering because their human rights are being violated. They draw attention to cases where people are being unfairly treated by their government. They hope to make governments more responsible and citizens more aware all over the world. The Sandy Gall's Afghanistan Appeal is a small organization and only operates in Afghanistan. It helps people who have lost limbs, and gives them treatment. In this way, this organization supports the government which does not have enough resources to do all this work alone. In Kabul, the NGO, Global Rights, trains women judges and lawyers about international laws and standards. The judges and lawyers also meet and discuss different aspects of the law in Afghanistan. They then make suggestions to the government about ways to make the laws better to help women. All these organizations are part of civil society.

Newspapers and radio of all kinds are very important to civil society. They publish information and opinion which educates and informs the readers and citizens. Although governments can provide information, they can only give one opinion or view. Newspapers and radio can also help governments by educating and informing them about events and views in the whole country. Why do we need more than one newspaper or magazine? Because any two people describing an event will have different memories of what happened. Each newspaper and radio station will have a different view on news stories and this variety provides balance.

Of course, civil society can just be ordinary men and women working together to achieve something for the benefit of everyone. Ordinary people in their own communities can make local changes. If you and your neighbors decide to clean the street in front of your houses, or build a safe play area for children, then you are part of civil society.

**Did you know?**

In the early days of the United States, the government was not yet able to provide schooling for the children. Local communities provided a schoolhouse or a schoolroom at their own expense and then looked for someone who could teach their children. This person often did not receive money, but worked as a teacher in exchange for food and a place to live.

We can all be a part of civil society in a small or large way. If fighting has destroyed your local school, you have several choices:

1. **You can just wait until the government is finished with all of the other things it is doing, and sends someone to take care of your problem OR**

2. **You can send a message to the government that your problem is very important and they need to do something about it sooner, not later OR**

3. **You can do something about it yourself by finding another room for the children to be temporarily taught in.**

Any of these actions make you part of civil society. Which one is the best for you to choose? It depends on the size of the problem so you have to decide which action to take according to each situation.
For example, imagine that there is an earthquake in a country. This is a very big and serious problem. Machines are needed to move the destroyed buildings, airplanes or trucks are necessary to bring doctors and clean water and tents and food for the survivors, government money is necessary to rebuild the houses that were destroyed. In fact, the job is too big even for any government to do on its own. Always, other countries offer their help. They send in teams of rescue specialists to look for people who are still alive, but were buried under the wreckage. They send doctors and equipment, and donations of food and clothing.

Should the people whose town was struck by an earthquake, therefore just wait until the foreign helpers arrive? Should they wait until their own government sends help? Obviously, that is not what they will do. They will immediately try to save themselves and their family, and to help their neighbors. They will expect help to come from their own capital city and from other countries, but while they are waiting they will work hard to help themselves and each other as well as they can.

This is a good way to handle most of the problems a community faces. If the government cannot, or will not, help you — at least not yet — then you can help yourself and your community in the meantime.

What is lobbying?

Sometimes these ordinary individuals or civil society groups want to influence the work and decisions of government. This is called lobbying. The aim of all lobbying is to influence the people who actually have the authority to make decisions.

Lobbying can be done on behalf of those who cannot speak up for themselves or those who have special needs — such as the homeless, children and the environment.

Lobbying can serve the interests of commercial associations and businesses too. For example foreign companies lobby governments to change laws that make trade across international borders difficult or expensive.

Those with specialist knowledge that is highly valued by decision makers can also do lobbying. For example, in Afghanistan the International Federation of Election Services (IFES) was invited to make suggestions to the government and the United Nations about how to organize the elections in Afghanistan. This is because the IFES has a lot of knowledge and experience in elections.

Lobbying by the organizations that make up civil society plays a vital role in a democracy. Well-organized groups within society can continually test government policies, ensuring that the views of the people are taken into account when new laws are made. Democratic governments and their politicians have learned that they must listen to and learn from criticism and have their policies examined in detail by different groups. In some countries, governments routinely consult with charities before making new laws because they recognize that a charity group can know more than the government about the people affected by the law. This is not a weakness of democracy, it is a strength.
CIVIL SOCIETY IN ACTION

1 Nutrition class, Madagascar
2 Generating income: collecting the harvest to sell, Bangkok
3 Community meeting
4 Researchers studying vegetables, China
5 Working in a tree 'nursery', Nepal
6 Youth club learning to use computers
7 Literacy class in Peru
8 Reading nutrition handbooks by the Food and Agricultural Organization, Senegal
Lobbying enables citizens to have a say in the decisions made by government. Such dialogue between citizens and government increases political stability by providing an outlet for individual and collective complaints and demands. Lobbying gives people hope that they can make a difference.

**What you can do!**

You can get public attention for a problem or issue:

- You can organize an event and write to the newspapers, radio and internet Web sites so that they will publish a story or article about your problem.
- You can use any personal links to the government and establish contact with ministers and government employees. They can inform decision-makers of your opinions.
- You can work closely with candidates for government; i.e. the people who wish to be elected in the next election. You can promise support to candidates who want to help to solve your problem.
- You can get people to support you in large numbers. For example, one civil society group called Negar (Support for Women in Afghanistan) wrote a declaration to the Constitutional Loya Jirga asking for women to be equal to men in the new law. They gathered hundreds of signatures from people all around the world who agreed. This declaration was presented to President Karzai, who even signed it himself.

**Doing your part – every man and every woman can help rebuild civil society**

During the last decades, Afghans have become experts at creating a secret, covert, civil society. They organized many, many activities to help themselves and others – running secret schools for girls in parts of the country controlled by the Taliban, organizing health clinics and literacy classes in the refugee camps in Pakistan, taking care of orphans and doing many of the other things that were needed.

Now that millions of Afghan children including girls have enrolled in school, the education level is likely to change dramatically within a generation. Many Afghan parents today value the schooling of their girls, and in many places have gone to a lot of trouble and endured risks to make sure their daughters can be educated. There have been instances when extremists burned down girls' schools. In every case, this only served to make the affected community even more determined to rebuild and move forward.

It is often difficult to take part in lobbying, especially for a person who has little time or energy after her work or duties, or for one who is afraid of the

**Did you know?**

Some lobbyists are very extreme in their methods: their members chain themselves to fences or do illegal actions such as exploding bombs. They hope that such threatening or intimidating methods will force the government to agree to their demands. However such activities can work against the idea of a civil society and often this lobbying is less successful than the peaceful sort.
risks. There is no doubt that in many cases people prefer to have someone else make decisions for them. It might feel that participating in public life and helping to rebuild civil society is too risky, or requires too much hard work. In order to achieve a better society, one that is peaceful, stable and prosperous, everyone is needed.

What you can do!

Rebuilding civil society is a difficult challenge, but we can all join the path to a better Afghanistan and every small effort counts. Here are some of the ways that you personally can make help rebuild civil society in your community.

• **Vote**
  The most important civic duty in a democracy is political participation, which in its most minimal sense involves voting, in secret and independently.

• **Be interested**
  Citizens can keep themselves informed, know about the world around them and ask questions about the ever-changing political, economic, and social environment of their life. Asking questions is not always easy; but unless we are curious we cannot learn.

• **Communal activity**
  Often it is ordinary people who get a group together to discuss how to deal with a particular local problem such as the need for a new water pump. Some citizens may decide to write letters to a newspaper, or travel to the capital and discuss problems with their parliamentary representative. For example, in the small European country Bosnia-Herzegovina, local communities came together and made useful suggestions to the local government. Between the local government and this community group, they found a way to build a new road through the town, which improved their lives enormously. Such communal involvement is what political democracy is all about.

• **Campaign activity**
  This involves working with a political party, either as a member or a sympathizer.

• **Organizing events**
  Organizing events to learn about safety and first aid, arranging help for a particular group of people and other such activities are enjoyable as well as educational. For example, it is not uncommon in Afghanistan that individuals who can teach organize classes in their own homes to help children who cannot go to school.

• **Family nurture**
  All over the world, women do the main work of caring for the family and raising the children. So in their everyday lives mothers, grandmothers and aunts can set a good example and so prepare the next generation for civil society.

**The Doctors and Nurses of Rabia Balkhi Hospital**

Rabia Balkhi Hospital in Kabul – this used to be a room for garbage. There was no-one to clean it up, so the doctors and nurses brought cleaning supplies and paint and worked together to make this a clean, modern nursery where newborn babies can be taken care of.
**What do you think?**

Have you or anyone you know, been helped by a civil society organization? When and how? How did this make a difference to you?

What kind of civil society organization would be useful in your neighborhood? What kinds of services could it organize or provide?

What skills do you have? Probably more than you think. Decide to take part!

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**A helping hand**

"It is one of the most beautiful compensations of this life that no man can sincerely try to help another without helping himself."

(Ralph Waldo Emerson)

**What is a support network?**

Every time you tell someone about a problem or try to solve it by reaching out to others, you are connecting with the energies, skills and ideas of others. Every time you listen, you understand more. When you look, you find out that there are other people like you, with the same frustrations. This is true for family relationships and friendships. It is also true for civil society. In civil society, reaching out to others is called a support network.

There are different types of networks. They can be small between individuals in a small area, like a large family. They can be large and organized, like a national organization, for example RAWA, or a national teachers union. With telephones, television and computers, networks can even connect people across the world. Being part of a network of people with similar goals, ideas and problems can help an individual get practical information and personal support.
What do you think?

Can you think of any examples of networking in your community? Is there a mothers group where young mothers can get support from each other? Is there an association of farmers who discuss the crops? Have you ever tried to introduce yourself to people who have influence in the community to solve a local problem?

Have you ever been to a conference or a meeting where different organizations (civil society groups) have been invited to talk about the same theme? For example, a conference about health might invite a doctor from a clinic, a minister from the government, and a member of a lobby group to talk about, say, immunization. These organizations can network with each other at the conference and help each other to solve a health problem.

For example, the Afghan Women’s Network is a network set up between non-governmental organizations (civil society groups) for women in Afghanistan. It is a network of organizations. Representatives meet weekly to coordinate and exchange information about their activities. Why might they do this: because although each organization has a different way of doing things, they all have the same goal; namely to help women in Afghanistan. They network because together they are stronger and more effective. Many voices in unison are loud and clear!

Now, because of developments in technology, it is much easier for networks to stretch from country to country. These networks do not have meetings or an office so it is called a virtual network, where you cannot see the other individuals. Instead, anyone can be a part of this network by reading a website on the internet, that is, on a computer with a link to other computers in the world. One example is the international non-governmental network called Women Living Under Muslim Laws which links Muslim and non-Muslim women from all over the world.

What you can do!

Anyone can reach out to others. Sometimes it is obvious where to go when you have a problem or an idea. Sometimes you have to look and ask around.

- You may know of a club or council that already meets.
- You may have access to the magazines, newspapers or the radio, where people or groups are written about or advertised.
- Maybe you know how to use the internet or know someone who does. Sometimes you may need to ask a friend or trusted relative if they can help you. The internet is a good place to look for organisations and groups.
- It is possible to start your own own club or network. Just one ordinary person can decide to start a network. For example, one person can decide to start a discussion club, where friends meet regularly and discuss one problem or issue, like a health problem or a news story. Together you can exchange ideas and information, support and inspire each other.
The Advocate story

Nasrine Gross fights for the rights of women in Afghanistan

When Nasrine Abou Bake Gross arrived with a group of American women in August 2001 in the area of Afghanistan controlled by the anti-Taleban forces of the United Front, she must have raised quite a few eyebrows. She did not wear a head-scarf but wore trousers and make-up, smoked cigarettes and was not shy to speak her mind. If it seemed that she did not care for her homeland traditions - nothing could be further from the truth. Nasrine is a tireless campaigner for women's rights in Afghanistan, a discerning Muslim, and deeply knowledgeable of Afghanistan's history and culture. From delivering supplies of flour and text books to challenging the highest authorities: no task is too small or too large for her.

Life was quite straightforward for Nasrine during her childhood in Kabul. “I was growing up in the 1950s as a normal young girl,” she remembers. “I went to school, came home, I played with my girlfriends. We went out to restaurants, to the movies. We wore nail polish, we had short skirts. Women were represented in all spheres of work in the Afghani society.” In 1964, Nasrine left Afghanistan on a scholarship to study at University in Beirut. There she met her husband Max Gross and after her graduation the couple moved to the United States. Nasrine and then began a successful career with computers and management. But she never forgot her home and never guessed that she would return over 37 years later.

About ten years ago about her birthplace that she wanted to Afghan women. book entitled Qas-ories of the Firsts mibility as Afghans). the more she 2000, she attended a conference in Tajikistan's capital, Dushanbe, which was organized by a group called NEGAR-Support of Women of Afghanistan. They had the idea to write a Declaration of the Essential Rights of Afghan Women. For Nasrine Gross, this declaration has changed her life.

She and her colleagues took this declaration and asked people to support it with a signature. They met political leaders, governments and the United Nations. They went to Afghanistan and organized women and men to join them in their struggle. From clerics, chiefs, and commanders to peasants, farmers, Nasrine worked hard to tell the world about the declaration. Sometimes people were sceptical of her and
not used to highly educated urban women. The fact that Nasrine lived outside Afghanistan for so long meant she had to earn their trust. "I don't want to change their values. I want women to have choices," she says.

Nasrine kept on campaigning. She organized demonstrations, wrote to newspapers, gave speeches, attended conferences and developed internet networks. However, of all these efforts, one single signature will always have a special place in her memory: the one given at the ceremony celebrating the transfer of power from the former King, Mohammad Zahir Shah, to the interim government on 22 December 2001. "We asked to see Mr. Karzai. His office gave us a fifteen-minute meeting," said Nasrine. "When we went there, Mr. Karzai kept us with him for three and a half hours."

Hamid Karzai invited five women, including Nasrine, into a private office and surprised them when he asked for a pen so he could sign the declaration. He told them that it was part of Afghanistan's tradition to give equal rights to women and it was also in keeping with the laws and spirit of Islam. Nasrine said "This is a great moment for Afghan women. The Phoenix is rising out of the ashes and it's a new day."

In January 2004 the work of Nasrine and other advocates was rewarded: the new constitution of Afghanistan gave women equal rights with men.
HUMAN RIGHTS IN AFGHANISTAN

FOR PROTECTION

FOR PEACE
CHAPTER FOUR: HUMAN RIGHTS

Human rights are the rights people are entitled to simply because they are human beings, no matter their citizenship, nationality, race, ethnicity, language, sex, sexuality, or abilities. Human rights become enforceable when they are codified as conventions, covenants, or treaties, or as they become recognized as customary international law.

Why is everybody talking about human rights?

People who live with human rights laws protecting their society want everybody to know about them! Human rights are indeed exciting because if humans can learn to live by and respect human rights laws, then there is a good chance that the people of the world can live together with more peace, more security, and more prosperity. This would mean less war, less violence and less strife.

These human rights laws are part of the new Afghanistan Constitution, so what are they? Where do they come from? How do they work? How can having human rights make a difference in daily life?

What are human rights and where do they come from?

Human rights draw from the most essential human values and instincts. The idea of human values is probably as old as mankind itself. These values exist at some level in all cultures and beliefs across the globe. The idea that one should treat other people as you would want them to treat you, for example, is common to many religions. African 'ubuntu' holds humans in high value. Islam gives many rights to its believers and provides protection to foreigners. Christians believe that Jesus said, "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you."

The basic principle of human rights then, is that everyone is born with certain rights simply because they are human and that no one – no person, no government, no army – can take them away. Some of these basic rights include the right to an adequate standard of living, the right to share in the life of the community, the right to say or think what you want, the right to practice the religion of your choice, and the right to associate with other human beings of your choosing.

So, human values and instincts are not new, but the idea of collecting all the values and writing them down is a modern idea. Some were written down during the American and French revolutions of the 18th century, over 200 years ago. Then, two generations ago, the Second World War ended in 1945. This had been a war with so much suffering and horror that many states wanted to do something to help prevent anything like this ever happening again. The countries of the world came together at a meeting of the United Nations and produced a Universal Declaration of Human Rights, a list of values and principles of freedom and dignity that are common to all mankind. It is pleasing to note that one woman, Eleanor Roosevelt, was the Chairperson of the Human Rights Commission (team or group) that wrote this declaration.

This Universal Declaration of Human Rights was the first of its kind to be adopted (accepted by vote) by the United Nations General Assembly. Since then, the countries of the world have continued to work on this subject, and additional
conventions have been agreed upon to define more exactly what they mean. Work has also been done to develop ways to make sure that countries truly obey and respect these rights in their national laws and in their daily practice. For example there is the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (1966) and the Convention of the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (1979). These conventions and these legal documents are held in great respect by many governments, organizations and individuals. Those individuals and communities respecting these human rights are on the path to good human development and human security.

UNIVERSAL DECLARATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) contains 30 articles. The complete text can be found at the end of this chapter. It is also available on the internet and through organizations such as Amnesty International and the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (UNHCHR).

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights provides for an enormous range of rights for every man, woman and child within a country. These are so wide-ranging that they affect every aspect of the life of an ordinary person, without them even realizing it.

Under this Declaration, these are some of the rights people in Afghanistan now have:

- The right to life, liberty and security;
- The right to be treated equally before the law, even if you are poor or have low status;
- The right to a full and fair public hearing to determine your guilt or innocence if you are accused of a crime;
- The right to be presumed innocent until found guilty by a fair and legal court (if you are accused of a crime);
- The right to move and live freely within your country, and to use a passport to travel to other countries;
- The right to seek asylum in other countries if you are persecuted;
- The right to have a nationality;
- The right to marry and to start a family, no matter what religion or ethnicity you are;
- The right to own property and not to have your property taken away arbitrarily;
- The right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion. This includes the freedom to change religion as well as the right to worship;
- The right to freedom of opinion and expression;
CHAPTER FOUR: HUMAN RIGHTS

- The right to take part in the government of your country, directly or through freely chosen representatives;
- The right to work and to have equal pay for that work whether you are a man or a woman;
- The right to rest and leisure, including periodic paid holidays and not excessive working hours;
- The right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of you and your family, including food, housing, clothing and medical care;
- The right to special care and assistance to protect motherhood and childhood. All children shall enjoy the same social protection.
- The right to education, which should be free and compulsory at the elementary stage;
- The right to take part in the cultural life of your community.

The Declaration also gives you the right to:

- Not be held in slavery or servitude;
- Not be tortured;
- Not be arbitrarily arrested or imprisoned;
- Not have your privacy interfered with or your honor and reputation attacked;
- Not be forced into marriage against your will.

What do you think?

Go through the points above one by one – do you understand them?

Here are some of the practices that cause women to suffer in Afghanistan. Can you find which parts of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights that forbid these practices?

- Girls in Afghanistan are often forced to marry before the legal age.
- Girls are obliged to marry someone they do not know, or someone they explicitly do not want to marry.
- Young women (and men) are prevented from marrying the person they wish to marry.
- Wives are beaten by their husband or other members of his family.
- Wives are not allowed to leave the house without permission.
- Wives are forced to work in the family household from early in the morning until late at night.
- One person telling lies about her can destroy a woman’s reputation.
Why are human rights laws different to religions and cultures?

Let us remember the Second World War, which we mentioned just before. It took place 60 years ago and affected most of the countries on earth, fifty million people (50,000,000) were killed. This is such an enormous number of people that it is difficult to imagine. This is two people dead for every one person living in Afghanistan today. All these deaths took place in only six years of fighting, and more than half those killed were civilians and not soldiers at all. The people killed were from many different countries and were followers of all the different religions.

When the war had finished, governments all over the world wanted to find a way to make sure that such a war could never happen again. This is why the Human Rights Declaration and other similar laws were created. The Human rights laws were designed especially to include people of all religions and nationalities. They were not created in any one part of the world, or by members of any one religion or way of life.

Human rights laws were created in a very special way to ensure that they could benefit all of mankind and not alienate any particular religious or ethnic group. Different religions were referred to and many of the rights are in fact first mentioned in religious material. For example the Prophet Mohammed refers to the right to seek asylum from persecution and the right to worship.

In this world we are often divided by what makes us different; different clothes, different faiths, different languages, different colour of skin and different ways of living. However human rights actually unite us because they are about what we have in common, whichever country or culture we are from.

Human rights laws are made by people, for people, and only people can make them work. They did not evolve from one particular leader, or miracle, or book. No land or people can claim supremacy over them. Perhaps this is why there is no rivalry between people over human rights, they speak through all languages and can travel to all lands in a way that no one religion or one culture in history ever has.

As you can see, human rights laws are fairly new. Some people believe that they are a Western idea that is not appropriate outside the West. In fact, many of these rights were included in the Qur’an hundreds of years before they were introduced to the West. Though Islamic societies and governments have not always implemented them, these include the right to life, respect, justice, freedom, education, sustenance, work, privacy, protection from slander, to leave one’s homeland from oppressive conditions and the right to worship.

How do human rights work?

Human rights work in two ways: through people and through governments. Men, women and children can decide to live by and respect human rights, but responsibility for the protection of human rights lies with each country and its government.

Human rights are written down in promises or laws called declarations or conventions, covenants, or treaties. The United Nations organization is best
known for making these conventions but there are also regional organizations writing them too, such as the Council of Europe or the African Commission on Human and Peoples’ Rights.

Each country can decide which laws it will respect and bring into their own legal system. The governments, judicial system and police then have the job of upholding these human rights laws. When somebody violates a human rights law (or any law) then the police and the courts system of that country should deal with that person. When a government (or individual from a government) violates human rights laws then the case can be sent to an international court to deal with. The United Nations International Criminal Court is based in Holland, a small north-European country.

Don’t forget that civil society also has a part to play in safeguarding human rights. Human rights organizations, journalists, workers unions, and of course ordinary people can all watch to ensure that human rights are being respected in the laws and decisions of the government. They can also watch over businesses, employers and educational institutions. If they are not satisfied that human rights laws are being properly respected they can tell the government through the media; in consultations; through networks; campaigning; and ultimately through elections. (See chapter three for more information on lobbying.)

What you can do!

Try to learn about your basic human rights:

- Attend a local training course if there is one or try to organize one yourself by approaching an organization that promotes human rights and asking for more information.
- If you have access to the internet, there are many websites about human rights. There is a good home training book called ‘Claiming our Rights’ by Mahnaz Afkhami President and CEO, Women’s Learning Partnership for Rights, Development and Peace at www.learningpartnership.org
- You could contact a local newspaper or women’s magazine or radio station if you know one and ask them to report about human rights in Afghanistan.

How do we get these rights? Will we always have them?

We saw in Chapter Two that many human rights, including the right to vote, were not granted to all human beings in all countries at the same time. This is due to wealth, race, gender and other factors and today people continue to struggle for their basic freedoms in many countries.

Fortunately Afghanistan now has an up-to-date constitution. Afghanistan has officially committed itself to human rights: girls are entitled to go to school, women have the right to work and move freely and vote and participate in every part of social and political life.

However, it is one thing to have certain rights on paper, and quite another to actually find them respected in real life. You may find that others in your surroundings – your neighbors, your local leaders, and even some members of
your family – still think differently. Or, they may not have thought about these matters at all.

Once a country is normalized and functioning properly, your rights are protected by the law, which in turn is protected by the police and the courts. If people try to take away your rights, you can then go to the police for help, or take the person to a court of law, or take other such measures depending on the particular case. However, Afghanistan is still in the process of building its police and its court system, and things are not yet working as they should and as they one day will. By discussing these issues with people around you, you can make this good day arrive more quickly.

In a family or with people you know, talking things through is often the best approach. People do things in a certain way because they think it is good, and right. If you can explain that another way is better and will make everyone happier and more successful in their lives, you might get them to agree with you.

Did you know?


There are several groups and commissions in Afghanistan which have been working towards the promotion and awareness of human rights including:

The Afghan Human Right's Commission, an NGO, was first established in Peshawar in 1998.

The Afghan Organization of Human Rights & Environmental Protection was established in Peshawar, in 2000.

The human rights law group, established in Kabul recently, is involved in training on human rights and is now called Global Rights: Partners for Justice.
On December 10, 1948 the General Assembly of the United Nations adopted and proclaimed the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the full text of which appears in the following pages. Following this historic act the Assembly called upon all Member countries to publicize the text of the Declaration and "to cause it to be disseminated, displayed, read and expounded principally in schools and other educational institutions, without distinction based on the political status of countries or territories."

**PREAMBLE**

Whereas recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world,

Whereas disregard and contempt for human rights have resulted in barbarous acts which have outraged the conscience of mankind, and the advent of a world in which human beings shall enjoy freedom of speech and belief and freedom from fear and want has been proclaimed as the highest aspiration of the common people,

Whereas it is essential, if man is not to be compelled to have recourse, as a last resort, to rebellion against tyranny and oppression, that human rights should be protected by the rule of law,

Whereas it is essential to promote the development of friendly relations between nations,

Whereas the peoples of the United Nations have in the Charter reaffirmed their faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person and in the equal rights of men and women and have determined to promote social progress and better standards of life in larger freedom,

Whereas Member States have pledged themselves to achieve, in co-operation with the United Nations, the promotion of universal respect for and observance of human rights and fundamental freedoms,

Whereas a common understanding of these rights and freedoms is of the greatest importance for the full realization of this pledge,

**Now, Therefore,**

**THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY**

**proclaims**

**THIS UNIVERSAL DECLARATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS** as a common standard of achievement for all peoples and all nations, to the end that every individual and every organ of society, keeping this Declaration constantly in mind, shall strive by teaching and education to promote respect for these rights and freedoms and by progressive measures, national and international, to secure their universal and effective recognition and observance, both among the peoples of Member States themselves and among the peoples of territories under their jurisdiction.
Article 1. All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood.

Article 2. Everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration, without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status. Furthermore, no distinction shall be made on the basis of the political, jurisdictional or international status of the country or territory to which a person belongs, whether it be independent, trust, non-self-governing or under any other limitation of sovereignty.

Article 3. Everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of person.

Article 4. No one shall be held in slavery or servitude; slavery and the slave trade shall be prohibited in all their forms.

Article 5. No one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.

Article 6. Everyone has the right to recognition everywhere as a person before the law.

Article 7. All are equal before the law and are entitled without any discrimination to equal protection of the law. All are entitled to equal protection against any discrimination in violation of this Declaration and against any incitement to such discrimination.

Article 8. Everyone has the right to an effective remedy by the competent national tribunals for acts violating the fundamental rights granted him by the constitution or by law.

Article 9. No one shall be subjected to arbitrary arrest, detention or exile.

Article 10. Everyone is entitled in full equality to a fair and public hearing by an independent and impartial tribunal, in the determination of his rights and obligations and of any criminal charge against him.

Article 11. (1) Everyone charged with a penal offence has the right to be presumed innocent until proved guilty according to law in a public trial at which he has had all the guarantees necessary for his defence. (2) No one shall be held guilty of any penal offence on account of any act or omission which did not constitute a penal offence, under national or international law, at the time when it was committed. Nor shall a heavier penalty be imposed than the one that was applicable at the time the penal offence was committed.

Article 12. No one shall be subjected to arbitrary interference with his privacy, family, home or correspondence, nor to attacks upon his honour and reputation. Everyone has the right to the protection of the law against such interference or attacks.

Article 13. (1) Everyone has the right to freedom of movement and residence within the borders of each state. (2) Everyone has the right to leave any country, including his own, and to return to his country.

Article 14. (1) Everyone has the right to seek and to enjoy in other countries asylum
from persecution.
(2) This right may not be invoked in the case of prosecutions genuinely arising from non-political crimes or from acts contrary to the purposes and principles of the United Nations.

**Article 15.** (1) Everyone has the right to a nationality.
(2) No one shall be arbitrarily deprived of his nationality nor denied the right to change his nationality.

**Article 16.** (1) Men and women of full age, without any limitation due to race, nationality or religion, have the right to marry and to found a family. They are entitled to equal rights as to marriage, during marriage and at its dissolution.
(2) Marriage shall be entered into only with the free and full consent of the intending spouses.
(3) The family is the natural and fundamental group unit of society and is entitled to protection by society and the State.

**Article 17.** (1) Everyone has the right to own property alone as well as in association with others.
(2) No one shall be arbitrarily deprived of his property.

**Article 18.** Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance.

**Article 19.** Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers.

**Article 20.** (1) Everyone has the right to freedom of peaceful assembly and association.
(2) No one may be compelled to belong to an association.

**Article 21.** (1) Everyone has the right to take part in the government of his country, directly or through freely chosen representatives.
(2) Everyone has the right to equal access to public service in his country.
(3) The will of the people shall be the basis of the authority of government; this shall be expressed in periodic and genuine elections which shall be by universal and equal suffrage and shall be held by secret vote or by equivalent free voting procedures.

**Article 22.** Everyone, as a member of society, has the right to social security and is entitled to realization, through national effort and international co-operation and in accordance with the organization and resources of each State, of the economic, social and cultural rights indispensable for his dignity and the free development of his personality.

**Article 23.** (1) Everyone has the right to work, to free choice of employment, to just and favourable conditions of work and to protection against unemployment.
(2) Everyone, without any discrimination, has the right to equal pay for equal work.
(3) Everyone who works has the right to just and favourable remuneration ensuring for himself and his family an existence worthy of human dignity, and supplemented, if necessary, by other means of social protection.
(4) Everyone has the right to form and to join trade unions for the protection of his interests.
Article 24. Everyone has the right to rest and leisure, including reasonable limitation of working hours and periodic holidays with pay.

Article 25. (1) Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond his control.
(2) Motherhood and childhood are entitled to special care and assistance. All children, whether born in or out of wedlock, shall enjoy the same social protection.

Article 26. (1) Everyone has the right to education. Education shall be free, at least in the elementary and fundamental stages. Elementary education shall be compulsory. Technical and professional education shall be made generally available and higher education shall be equally accessible to all on the basis of merit.
(2) Education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. It shall promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations, racial or religious groups, and shall further the activities of the United Nations for the maintenance of peace.
(3) Parents have a prior right to choose the kind of education that shall be given to their children.

Article 27. (1) Everyone has the right freely to participate in the cultural life of the community, to enjoy the arts and to share in scientific advancement and its benefits.
(2) Everyone has the right to the protection of the moral and material interests resulting from any scientific, literary or artistic production of which he is the author.

Article 28. Everyone is entitled to a social and international order in which the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration can be fully realized.

Article 29. (1) Everyone has duties to the community in which alone the free and full development of his personality is possible.
(2) In the exercise of his rights and freedoms, everyone shall be subject only to such limitations as are determined by law solely for the purpose of securing due recognition and respect for the rights and freedoms of others and of meeting the just requirements of morality, public order and the general welfare in a democratic society.
(3) These rights and freedoms may in no case be exercised contrary to the purposes and principles of the United Nations.

Article 30. Nothing in this Declaration may be interpreted as implying for any State, group or person any right to engage in any activity or to perform any act aimed at the destruction of any of the rights and freedoms set forth herein.

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FIVE GOOD REASONS...
**CHAPTER FIVE: OUR COUNTRY – MY ROLE**

**What can I do?**

Afghanistan is not the only country with a troubled past. Sixty years ago, there was a long war in which Germany and Japan were both very badly damaged by bombing campaigns. These two countries have both rebuilt themselves as thriving democracies. The people living in Germany and Japan have a high standard of living, good free education and good health care. They are both strong countries with an important voice in the world.

South Africa spent many decades with the majority ethnic group being oppressed by a powerful minority. This created hatred and fear between the two groups. Many people on both sides were killed in civil unrest. Fifteen years ago, South Africa became a democracy with every person having equal political rights. South Africa is now one of the most politically stable countries in the region of Southern Africa, a complete change from the previous civil strife.

These examples show that with some dedication and determination, Afghanistan could also become a politically stable country in which all the people enjoy a good standard of living. Afghanistan is a magnificent country and has much to offer the world. The people of all ethnic groups living in Afghanistan know of Afghanistan's heritage and traditions. Afghanistan belongs to the people living now and their children to come.

There are no quick solutions to the problems of Afghanistan. People in Afghanistan have to ask themselves: what is my role in our country? Every woman must ask herself: what can I do?

**One simple way for women to take part**

Instructions given to Muslims in the Qur’an refers to both male and female believers alike (Qur’an 33:35). Men and women have been given the same religious duties and will be judged according to the same criteria. Muslim doctrine holds that women are not in any way inferior beings to men, but were created originally from the same single soul (see Surah 4:1).

So the role of women is as important as the role of men.

Women all around the world, as mothers, daughters, sisters and wives, are the main care-givers in society. They raise the children, cook and clean, they are

**Did you know?**

In the days of the Prophet Muhammad, women were active and equal members of the new community of Muslims he had assembled around him. His wife Khadija was a successful businesswoman, and he met her because, initially, she was his employer. When he received his first revelation, she encouraged him and became the first convert to Islam. The Prophet Muhammad had appointed a woman to be the overseer of the local market. A woman was the caretaker of his mosque. Later, some women even fought in his military. Women prayed in his mosque, next to the men.
healers in the families and pass the knowledge of the home from one generation to another. Some women are even very powerful within the community. That is exactly why it is important that our voices are heard when decisions are made about the future of our country. And now that Afghanistan is a democracy, women have the opportunity - along with the women of forty-four other Islamic states in the world - to bring their voices into the political process.

Indeed, it is good that women do participate, for women have different ideas than men do about society and politics and can therefore bring new ideas to a political process. Women's participation in politics can also raise the level of trust in the government. Women have different priorities, and are more likely than men to put issues on the agenda, such as fighting hunger and poverty, protecting the environment, promoting family health, providing for quality education and ensuring human rights. Without women's participation, some of these issues might not get the attention they deserve! Women also have a vital role to play in solving problems that mostly women experience as well as issues that both women and men face in our societies. Of course, not every woman can work in politics or for the government. However, there is one simple way for women to take part in public life and bring their voices into the political process - and that is by voting in an election.

Did you know?

Many scholars believe that Islam is inherently a democratic religion. For example, consider the important saying of the Prophet: "my community will never agree on an error." This means that the best way to make a good decision is for all of the members of the community to make the decision together.

Don't forget that women all over the world had to campaign for many years before being given the same right to vote as men. In England, many women went on a hunger strike and one died because she believed strongly that women should have this right. There are many other examples of women who made great personal sacrifices to ensure that women who came after them would be able to enjoy the rights and privileges that were denied to them in their lifetime. This handbook only mentions a few of the many women from around the world who spent their lives struggling for the right to vote. If these women considered this right something worth dying for, shouldn't you consider it to be a valuable gift worth preserving?

Democracy only works when citizens believe their participation is necessary and valued. Sometimes women feel that their participation in an election does not really matter, or would not make a difference, especially when millions of other people are eligible to vote. It's easy to think this, but it's not true. Sometimes the difference between a candidate who wins and a candidate who loses is only a handful of votes, one of which might be yours. Every single vote counts and makes a difference.
The Dedicated Doctor

Dr. Sima Simar works to strengthen the human rights of men, women and children in Afghanistan

In Afghanistan's Hazarajat province, the name Sima is becoming popular for little girls. They are being named in honour of Dr. Sima Simar. Dr. Simar was renowned for challenging the Taliban. "Go ahead and kill me," she would say, "but be sure you publish my crimes!" What were those crimes? Running schools to educate Afghan girls and women, and building hospitals and clinics. Through the years of Soviet and then Taliban rule, Sima has worked to defend the rights of women, often in the face of insults, death threats and slander, but her courage never faltered.

Sima studied medicine at Kabul University. When she was still a student, her husband was arrested by the Communists and never seen or heard from again. However, this was not Sima’s first test in life. From the beginning, she noticed that life was difficult for her because; “I'm a woman, I speak out for women and I'm a Hazara, one of the minority tribes.” Sima was determined and completed her studies, then moved to the rural areas of Afghanistan. She was appalled by the lack of health education among the people there and decided to help them.

Her work became even harder when the Taliban took control of Afghanistan and passed the various Fatwas (religious rulings) denying women and girls their basic rights to education, employment, mobility and medical care. Sima challenged the Taliban dress-code for women and refused to wear a Burqa or a veil, while continuing to voice women's rights. “Almost every woman I see has softening bones from lack of Vitamin D,” Sima said at the time. “They survive on a diet of tea and naan because they can't afford eggs and milk and their Burqas and veils deprive them of sunshine. On top of that, depression is endemic here because the future is so dark.”

Later, Sima moved across the border to Quetta in Pakistan, where she started the Shuhada Organisation (SO), which established a school and a clinic for Afghan refugee women to heal their bodies and psyches. In Afghanistan itself, she supported several small secret schools for girls and ran another medical clinic in Kabul. Her work was recognized internationally and she joined a group called Women Living Under Muslim Laws, which has links with 40 countries and is a powerful voice at the United Nations. Her valuable contribution to the cause of human rights and peace in Afghanistan earned Sima a place as Minister of the Women's Ministry in the interim government. She was the first woman to hold such a position in the history of Afghan Government.
However, this was not the end of Sima's struggle. During and after the Emergency Loya Jirga, she faced threats from men aligned with the Jamiat faction as well as from officials in Government. Many other women attending were threatened not to "make trouble." A petition was circulated at the Loya Jirga denouncing the Women's Affairs Minister and accusing her of making statements against the Islamic country's interests. The charges were later dropped, but Sima was barred from public office by Afghanistan's Chief Justice, Mawlawi Fazel Hadi Shinwari. Dr. Simar is now the head of Afghanistan's newly-formed independent Human Rights Commission. She and her staff investigate cases of human rights violations in the country.

Dr. Simar is clearly an example of those heroic and learned women who throughout history have defied the status quo and helped to carve a future for women that convention and prejudice once denied them. As she once told the Taliban: "You know where I am. I won't stop what I'm doing."
What you can do!

With the picture below you can easily remind yourself and others of five good reasons for women to participate in politics and civil society.

**Middle finger**
The longest finger points the way to a brighter future in Afghanistan. Women's talents are needed to help improve life for all!

**Wedding finger**
This finger signifies the legal binding between man and woman and stands for the law. It reminds women to stand up for their human rights and to promote the rule of law in Afghanistan.

**Qalam finger**
This finger reminds us that in Islamic religion, we have equal rights and responsibilities. An important responsibility is to decide on your government.

**Thumb**
Like thumbs and fingers, women and men are different but worth the same. It's best when all work together. The thumb reminds you to bring the voice of women into the political processes.

**Little finger**
This finger reminds us of our children. You have an interest in who is running your government and in the decisions that affect you and your family. Each woman must decide for herself how much she is able to join in the rebuilding of Afghanistan, but even the smallest effort will be a gift to the next generation.

*Five good reasons...*
CHAPTER FIVE: OUR COUNTRY - MY ROLE

How do I vote?

In Afghanistan, the United Nations help to organize and run the National Elections. International men and women as well as Afghan men and women will be working in the main cities, towns and villages, explaining and publicizing the national elections that will take place in the near future.

The United Nations are also informing Afghan citizens about the election and they will produce different sorts of civic education materials such as posters and radio and television adverts, called ‘spots’. You may find these posters, in the street, at a local shop, at a school or even in a clinic: anywhere where lots of people will pass by and see it. This information will tell you about the voting process.

How do I choose who to vote for?

In most elections, more than one candidate or group of candidates will stand for election. Often these candidates reflect different ways of thinking in the community or region. It is good to have different candidates because then voters have a choice.

Usually, the various candidates provide information about themselves, their ideas, what they believe in, and what they plan to accomplish if they are elected. You can listen carefully to their promises. Is one candidate more interested in education? Has he or she promised to work especially hard on improving the schools? If this issue is important to you, you may decide to support this candidate with your vote. You could even decide to volunteer to help this candidate get their message out to other citizens like yourself.

What do you know about the person who is running? Their behavior in the past is a good guide to what you can expect from them in the future. Are they known for being honest and hard working and for keeping their promises? Do they associate with good people? When you look at the way they live their own life, what do they seem to care most about? Do they care mostly about getting rich, and having power, or do they seem to care about the problems of other people and about their country?

If candidates come to your area, you can ask questions and demand clear answers. What are their plans? What do they intend to work hardest on?
The costs of bad governance and how they affect you!

The party or individual running the government can make a big difference to the lives of the people living there. If a country is poorly run over several years, it can quickly fall behind its neighbors in terms of quality of life. Let's take a look at some examples.

- Tajikistan is right next door to Afghanistan, and has a similar economy. In Tajikistan, 40 babies die in every 2,000 born alive. In Afghanistan, almost 300 babies die for every 2,000 born alive.

- In another neighboring country, Turkmenistan, almost everybody can read. In Afghanistan, less than 4 people in every 10 can read.

- In Iran, there is one doctor for every 1,250 people. In Afghanistan, there is one doctor for every 7,000 people.

The everyday lives of the citizens are very different, depending on their recent governments.

If you vote in an informed manner, you can expect to see things begin to slowly improve in your daily life.

Our country – my role

After reading this book you may be inspired to take an active role in helping to rebuild your society. By taking part in public life; by networking with others; by contributing to civil society; by promoting the rule of law and human rights; and by setting a good example to others.

It is up to you how active you can become, and what form that activity may take. You can be highly active, or not participate at all. But it is important that you are aware that you have an impact no matter which way you choose – for good or bad. In a democratic society, the choice is yours to make.

What you can do

You can share your knowledge from this handbook with other women.

- Think of six women who you can talk to about what you have learned. You can talk to these women individually, when sharing chores or meals. Or you can organize a meeting, in a house for example.

- The next section of this book contains sessions for a training workshop. You can use this section to help you share your knowledge with others by being a group leader.

- You can read this handbook to someone else who cannot read or let someone else use it.

By sharing your knowledge you will be empowering other women to join you in your journey to a new and better Afghanistan. The more women involved in this journey, the brighter the future for Afghanistan.
Women hold up half the sky
DISCUSSIONS AND ACTIVITIES FOR FIVE WORKSHOPS

How to use this section

This section contains training suggestions and material, enough for use in 5 short women's workshops. These workshops are an introduction and awareness-raising tool to help Afghan women participate in their country's political and social reconstruction.

Each workshop needs a teacher or group leader who will lead group discussions and activities. The five workshops refer to the five chapters of the handbook and are only a suggestion. Of course, each group leader can add their own style and ideas according to the needs of the workshop participants. However the supplied material is designed for women from all walks of life and each workshop has a balance of oral, aural and kinetic exercises, with increasing complexity, that are good for adult learning.

For best results: read the handbook a few times before attempting to be a group leader; have a minimum of 6 participants and; allow between one and four hours for each workshop. Very little else is required and workshops can easily be organized in a home, a garden or a community centre.

The workshop instructions are in green writing like this:

Show a picture: "Women hold up half the sky." (Proverb)
This is on page 76. It shows women reaching their hands up to the sky. The group leader can hold up the picture and start the women thinking about themselves positively, she can ask: What does this proverb mean? What are some of the things women contribute that a society could not exist without? What do you, personally, do that is helpful and important to your family, your friends and your neighborhood?

The instructions are written for the group leader. They can suggest an activity, raise a discussion question, or provide a training tip. They help the trainer identify her role, and to plan, prepare and organise a training workshop.

There is also blue writing like this:

"It is one of the most beautiful compensations of this life that no man can sincerely try to help another without helping himself."

(Ralph Waldo Emerson)

The blue writing contains stories or interesting information that can be read aloud to participants. It can be read by the group leader or anyone else in the group who has a good voice.
DISCUSSIONS AND ACTIVITIES FOR FIVE WORKSHOPS

The symbols, by the side of each instruction, mean the following:

- **Read a text**: A story or interesting information to be read aloud to the group
- **Show a picture**: A picture that can be shown to a group, or cut out and passed around, or can even be put on the wall as a poster
- **Discussion question**: Suggested questions to motivate discussion on a theme
- **Action activity**: Learning activity where participants will need to move around, or get into smaller groups
- **Think about**: An exercise to signal the end of each workshop with a message or idea for participants to think about for themselves

**Guide for the group leader**

*"Education is not the filling up of a hole, but the lighting of a fire"*  
(proverb)

The job of the group leader in the workshops is to stimulate learning and motivate women to take part in public life and the reconstruction process – for the good of women and Afghanistan. The workshops should therefore also be participatory, interactive and encouraging and not like traditional school teaching.

The essential messages that need to be conveyed are:

- Afghan women are important and necessary.
- Women can help move Afghanistan from a state of war to a sense of order.
- Women can do this by: participating in the new democracy, working for a civil society and promoting human rights.

The group leader should match the level of curiosity and interest with the right level of information. The messages of the workshops are relevant to all women of different backgrounds and capacities, but the group leader can draw on material from the resource book and indeed other sources to adapt to the group’s needs.
Adults learn best when they feel valued as individuals and the message is relevant to their life. It helps that the workshop is well managed too, even in the highest level conferences, when a presentation goes on too long everyone loses interest!

Group leaders can help adults to learn by:

1. leading a respectful, relaxed and well-prepared workshop
2. ensuring that all participants answer questions and add their comments to discussions
3. appreciating and managing the contributions from individuals (making sure that the more confident group members leave time for others to speak or ask questions)
4. speaking slowly, clearly and neutrally. Present new information in small amounts at a time and repeat key themes often.
5. remembering their needs: if possible provide breaks, refreshments, avoid distractions (perhaps childcare facilities?) and keep to timings!

"I cannot remember what you said to me, but I can remember what you showed me"

Adults learn well when more than one of their senses is engaged. This means that adults prefer to see a picture or words relating to what the group leader is talking about. The workshops need little equipment, but it will be better if a group leader can use other equipment such as paper and pens, or a blackboard and chalk for example. Then the group leader can write up key words she uses or draw pictures to explain an idea. Many adults learn best through action and practice, even by touching. When you can, let them touch the teaching materials.

For some of the women, the sessions will provide a rare opportunity for them to consider larger questions, rather than focusing on their busy lives as usual. In any group session, it is very important to provide long enough breaks so that the women can talk to each other. If the women have several breaks during a day of sessions, they will discuss with each other what they have been learning. This is called networking and is a very important part of all training.

There are many different ways to run the five workshops. The group leader might want to have two workshops in one day, one before lunch and one after. Or she might want to run one workshop each day for five days, for example every afternoon between Sunday and Thursday. If the group have difficulty getting together, the group leader could present all the material in a full day session.
Group leaders can identify potential participants from

- local Ministry of Women’s Affairs women’s centres
- persons in their lives who would be interested: family, friends, neighbours
- local non-governmental organizations
- advertising in women’s media or at the schools and kindergartens
- Visiting nearby communities personally (especially for marginalized groups).

Feedback

A group leader will easily know if the participants are enjoying the workshops and finding them useful. When a group is interested, they are enthusiastic and constructive. When a group is disinterested, they will seem tired and restless. The mood of the group can depend on many factors that are out of the control of the group leader, such as the temperature or noise. Sometimes though, knowing what the group likes and doesn’t like can help the group leader to make the right changes. This is called feedback.

The group leader can get feedback in several ways, she can ask directly or the participants can fill out a form at the end of a training course. There can be a book and pen left out in a discreet place where participants can freely write down their comments and suggestions.

Some questions to the participants might be:

Did you find the course relevant? Yes / Quite / No (please select)
Were the materials adequate? Yes / Quite / No (please select)
Was the group leader competent? Yes / Quite / No (please select)

Or simply like this:

What did you like best about the course? (please write here)
What could we improve in the course? (please write here)
SESSION ONE: GETTING STARTED

Thinking About Women in Public Life

Activity: Discussions and exercises for a workshop
Goal: To feel comfortable in the group and be ready to discuss and learn about women's role in rebuilding Afghanistan.
Time required: 1 hour minimum - 2 hours and thirty minutes maximum.
Materials required: Comfortable and quiet sitting area for between 6 and 15 women. A fork and a spoon. A big bowl and a spoon for stirring. Small amount of food and drink for refreshments.

Instructions:

Participants enter and are seated in a circle. The group leader welcomes the group and gives the title and aim of the session. If the participants do not know each other, each person should give their name and then a little information about themselves. For example, if they are married, if they have children or how many brothers or sisters they have, where they live, if they have an occupation, or skill, even their favourite food or place. This should not take more than 1 or 2 minutes per person.

Show a picture: “Women hold up half the sky.” (Proverb)
This is on page 76. It shows women reaching their hands up to the sky. The group leader can hold up the picture and start the women thinking about themselves positively, she can ask: What does this proverb mean? What are some of the things women contribute that a society could not exist without? What do you, personally, do that is helpful and important to your family, your friends and your neighborhood?

Read a text aloud: The wedding Day of Neema

It is the wedding day of Neema. She is excited and has been looking forward to this day for a long time. After seeing her sisters married, it is finally her time to prepare for the wedding party and she is taken to a beauty parlor to dress and decorate herself for this special day. Neema has seen other women at marriages and has dreamed of how she wants to look. Later she complains to her sister Leyla about her disappointment. ‘Nobody asked me what I wanted, or saw that it did not suit me. I did not feel at my best and I was unhappy the whole day’. Leyla did not understand: ‘Why did you let it happen?’ she asked and Neema explained. ‘I did not know that I could tell them what I wanted, I did not understand what they were doing and I did not have the courage to ask them.’ Leyla comforted her sister: ‘Come now, do not be angry with yourself, for I can tell you that you do have courage. At home, you can certainly tell us when you do not like something!! In school, you could always ask when you did not understand something. And don’t forget that when we go to a salon, we pay the ladies to help us. We can tell them what we want and they will try their best to do it.’ Neema laughed and realised that she did indeed know what she wanted and how to express herself. She told her sister that in the future she would remember to find her courage even in new situations.
**Group discussion questions:** The wedding day of Neema
What can this simple story teach us about women's role in society? Why is it important that women get involved and take part in the decisions and management of their country even in a very small way?

**Fork and spoon – touch activity:** The group leader passes around a fork and a spoon for each of the participants to handle. She can say, "The role of men and women is a bit like the role of a spoon and folk. They are different from each other but both have something different to offer, both are needed!!" The group leader can develop this idea further if the group responds positively.

**Break for refreshments**

**Read a text aloud:** Running a government is like managing a family

Think about some of the things that need to be taken care of in a family:

- Prepare the meals to feed everyone
- Take care of the person who is sick
- Earn money
- Clean whatever is dirty, such as laundry and dishes
- Decorate the house so it will look nice
- Buy needed items from the market or shop
- If the family produces something, such as carpets, sell them
- Visit friends and relatives and have them visit you
- If you have a disagreement with a friend or neighbor, talk to them and try to fix it
- Teach the young children how to eat, talk, walk and behave properly

And have you noticed? All the jobs on this list are things which women can certainly do. In fact, most of them are things that are part of a housewife's everyday, normal responsibility.

Running a government is like running a family. The only difference is in the size. Let's look at how the things that are done in a family are just like the things that are done by a government:

**Ministry of Health**
*Takes care of those who are sick.*

**Ministry of Trade**
*Buys things the country needs, and sells things the country produces.*

**Ministry of Foreign Affairs**
*Keeps good relations with countries who are friends, and tries to resolve disputes with countries where there is a conflict.*

**Ministry of Education**
*Makes sure that children and young people can go to school and learn.*

**Ministry of Agriculture**
*Makes sure there is enough food.*
Mayor
Makes sure the city is clean, the garbage is collected, that the streets and parks look nice.

Women then, can do all of these things. In fact, it is important that they do. It can be seen all around the world, that in every country where women participate in life outside of the house, the quality of life improves for everyone. Of course it is necessary to be educated in order to do this work well. But even more, it is necessary to have the same qualifications that make a good housewife: to be practical and not extravagant; to be honest and really care about the well being of the family/country; to get along well with others and create a peaceful atmosphere.

Group discussion questions: Running a government is like managing a family
What jobs can you do now outside the home and family?
What personal qualities do women have that they can bring to public life?
Women are often good managers, are more tolerant of others, and less open to corruption for example.
Apart from work, what other ways can women contribute to a well running country?

- By learning how to read and write, women can increase their chances of obtaining lots of information, ideas and experiences that they need to care for their families and themselves.
- By registering and voting in elections, women can choose good leaders who will see that the environment and resources for her community are provided and protected.
- By uniting and supporting each other, women can strengthen their voice. Women can make demands, insist on change and encourage success.
- Women can help their country greatly right in their own homes. Since women are the main educators in the family, women can set a good example to the next generation.

(Optional) Group Activity: Words and Meanings

The group leader divides the group into pairs or threes and gives each one a word or expression, which they have three minutes to discuss between them. After three minutes the group leader asks each group to explain out loud the meaning of the word they have. If there is any misunderstanding or disagreement in the group, the group leader can clarify the meaning.
Something to think about: 'Cake for Afghanistan'
The group leader passes a mixing bowl and spoon around the room and asks everyone to put in an 'ingredient' and to stir it in. The ingredients can be anything that each person would like to see in the future of Afghanistan. For example: schooling for all children; or clean water in every village; or better health care; or even simply peace and happiness. It does not matter if the same ingredient is added twice. Each person is asked, in their own time at home, to reflect on this cake, to ask themselves what they each could do to help make this a reality.

The group leader writes the list of 'ingredients' on paper and puts the paper where the women can see it and remember it for the rest of the session.
SESSION TWO: WOMEN AND POLITICS IN THE MODERN WORLD

Thinking about how Women gained their Political Rights in History

Activity: Discussions and exercises for a workshop
Goal: To identify with and feel part of the women’s movement internationally and nationally, to be inspired and motivated by others.
Time required: 2 hours minimum - 3 hours maximum.
Materials required: Comfortable and quiet sitting area for between 6 and 15 women. Small amount of food and drink for refreshments.

Instructions:

Participants enter and are seated in a circle. The group leader welcomes the group and gives the title and aim of the session. She reminds them that in the last session they learned that women are important in rebuilding Afghanistan, they have a valuable and important role in domestic life and in public life.

Read a text aloud: The struggle for justice and equality

Around the world in history, whenever people tried to get equality and justice there were some men - and also some women - who tried to stop and discourage them. Almost everywhere in the world, women had to overcome resistance and had to fight for their right to vote, to get a good education, to work and to have equal legal rights.

In Afghanistan, women are experiencing the same struggles for their rights as their sisters have in many countries before them. Now, though, they have one advantage: the new constitution of Afghanistan states clearly that women and men are equal before the law. This includes equal political rights such as the right to vote and the right to be elected. The constitution also says that out of every four representatives in the House of People, at least one must be a woman. It looks as if the women of Afghanistan now have a good starting point.

Show a picture: 'Women’s suffrage map of the world'
This picture is on page 18. This shows countries of the world in a global map, their names and a date when women achieved full suffrage there. The group leader can hold up the picture and describe it or make a game of it, asking group participants to guess which country was the first to gain the vote, and then point to it for example. Are there any surprises on the ‘Women’s suffrage map of the world’?

Discussion questions: ‘Women’s suffrage map of the world’
Does the group think it is important to have the vote? Do they think they will vote at the next election?

Read a text aloud: How American women got the vote

Listen to this story of how the women in America gained their political rights.

American women did not become active in politics just to get more rights for themselves, but because there were important social issues that they felt...
strongly about but were unable to influence until they had a political voice. One of the issues these women cared about deeply was the question of slavery. They believed that it was wrong to keep other human beings as slaves. But in those days, it was permitted in the United States to keep black people as slaves. These women believed in equality – not only between men and women, but also between black people and white people.

Another issue women cared about at this time – this was the 19th century, 200 years ago – was temperance, which means the belief that alcohol should be forbidden. Alcohol misuse in those days was destroying many families. Many men would receive their paycheck, then go to a bar and spend the entire month's salary getting drunk. There would be no money left for food for their wife and children. Many women therefore believed that alcohol should be prohibited.

But whatever the issue that was important to them, women found that because they could not vote they had no influence over the laws and that politicians did not listen to them,

Women tried many different things to achieve their goal, the right to vote. They held a large meeting in Seneca Falls to discuss their strategies, and to get publicity for their plan. They published magazines and collected petitions and signatures. They organized marches and demonstrations. They gathered outside the White House, where the U.S. President lives and works, holding signs demanding the right to vote. Some of the women chained themselves to the White House fence so police could not send them away. (See page 23 for picture 'American and British Suffragettes')

Beginning in 1878, the rule that would have allowed women to vote was presented to the American Congress during each session. It was denied many times. Each time it was denied, the women did not give up. Instead, they immediately worked to get it presented again. Finally, it passed.

Just as in England, World War I was a turning point for American women, too. Women played such an important and active role, helping to defend their country and efficiently replacing men in factories and the workplace that it just wasn't possible any more to say that they were less capable than men. American women received the right to vote in 1920, more than 40 years after it was first presented to Congress.

This is only one story, but this pattern was repeated in many countries, and women now have equal voting rights as men in all but one country in the world (Kuwait). In fact currently in 25 countries women are head of state!! (See page 27 for picture 'Women as Heads of State')

Discussion questions: How American women got the vote
What sorts of things were done to discourage or stop these American women? What are the obstacles facing Afghan women today? How could a woman in a family become involved in politics if her husband did not want her to? How could she persuade him that she has something to offer politics and that her household would not suffer? (See page 55 and 56 for the Advocate story)

Women sometimes used non-peaceful methods to win support. They marched loudly in the streets, they chained themselves to buildings, and some refused to
eat. One woman in England threw herself under the Kings horse and died. Have there been examples of such actions in Afghanistan? Do you think women gain or lose support with such actions?

Break for refreshments

Read a text aloud: Who are the Afghan suffragettes?

The Afghan women’s movement has a story of its own. Fortunately there were men and women who encouraged and supported them. Here are just a few of them.

King Abdurrahman abolished the custom of levirate marriage (where a widow is forced to marry her deceased husband’s brother). He raised the age of marriage, and gave women a limited right to divorce.

King Habibullah prohibited the practice of overly expensive weddings, which were ruining many families. His wives stopped wearing the veil, in order to encourage other women to do this also, if they wanted to.

King Amanullah introduced mandatory and free education for both girls and boys. His wife, Queen Soraya sponsored schools, such as the Malalai Lycee. Together with women from her family she started a social welfare organization, Anjuman-I-Himayat-Niswan.

King Zahir Shah declared the wearing of the purdah or chadari to be voluntary. He built girls’ schools and hospitals for women. He enabled women to be sent abroad to be educated as nurses.

Meena laid the foundation of the Revolutionary Association of the Women of Afghanistan (RAWA). She organized numerous processions and meetings in schools, colleges and Kabul University to mobilize public opinion. She launched Payam-e-Zan (Women’s Message) in 1981.

200 women delegates attended the Emergency Loya Jirga. Dr. Massouda Jalal, ran for the position of President. Two women lawyers took part in the commission responsible for drafting the Afghan constitution. The current government includes four women ministers. The Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission includes five women and is chaired by a woman. (See page 45 and 45 for the Candidate story)

Discussion questions: Who are the supporters of the Afghan women’s movement?
Is it surprising to learn that Kings and Queens were working in the past to help the ordinary women? Is it inspiring that ordinary women have also been working to advance women’s rights? Can you think of any one else to add to the list? Has anybody ever joined in an activity promoting women’s rights? Does it make you feel different about having your basic rights in law now? (See page 42 for the picture of supporters of the Afghan women’s movement)

Something to think about: The group leader can say: “In 1926 Queen Soraya made a speech and said: “Do not think that our nation needs only men to serve it. Women should also take their part, as women did in the early years
of Islam. The valuable services rendered by women are recounted throughout history, from which we learn that women were not created solely for pleasure and comfort. From their examples we learn that we must all contribute toward the development of our nation..." So much has been done to give women a political voice in Afghanistan – how will you use this chance that has been given to you?"
SESSION THREE: CIVIL SOCIETY

Thinking About Women in Civil Society

Activity: Discussions and exercises for a workshop
Goal: To explain civil society and the ways in which women can be involved.
Time required: 2 hours minimum - 3 hours maximum.
Materials required: Comfortable and quiet sitting area for between 6 and 15 women. Small amount of food and drink for refreshments.

Instructions:

Participants enter and are seated in a circle. The group leader welcomes the group and gives the title and aim of the session. She reminds them that in the last sessions they learned that women are important in public life. They have seen how women have struggled for the right to be involved in public life, and how women have won this right in Afghanistan. Today, they will talk about some of the ways women can actually get involved.

Read a text aloud: Farid's garden and civil society

Civil society refers to that part of society that acts between the government and the home. So that includes volunteer and charity groups; parent and teacher associations; senior citizens groups; universities; sports clubs; trade unions; and non-profit think tanks. It also includes individuals or a small group of people who are working for a cause that is of interest to them, for example villagers who decide to work together to fix a road.

It might feel that participating in civil society is too much work. It often seems too complicated or too distant to think about. But to achieve a better society, one which is peaceful, stable and prosperous, everyone is needed to contribute to civil society and everyone can contribute in a small way. Listen to this story.

Farid has a very large garden. He must grow all the vegetables and fruit that his family needs. Farid is married and has three sons and three daughters. The garden needs a lot of work and Farid does not have much money to pay for help or machines. Once, there was a bad spring in Farid's garden. There was not enough rainfall and there was a snail eating much of the young plants. The family knew that unless something was done there would be no harvest that year.

They sat together and talked about what could be done, Farid was a proud man and did not like to ask for help, but he realized that they needed help from someone else. Firstly, Farid and his wife went into the town and discussed with other neighbors how to get water. They decided to all go to visit their local government representative together. When the representative saw all the people coming to his room, he realized that he could not ignore them.

Later in the month the representative announced that he had found help from an international organization and that water trucks would come to each street giving a certain number of water canisters per week. Farid was very pleased; now if he was careful there would be enough water. His wife was pleased with the representative, she saw he could be trusted and thought she might vote for him at the next election.
Farid’s daughter-in-law also had a good idea. Her brother knew someone who wrote for a newspaper and together they asked the journalist to write about their snail problem. The journalist told them that indeed the snail was a problem in the region and he decided to write a long article for the paper. Farid’s family was surprised to see the response to the newspaper article.

At first, people talked about it in the town, and then he was visited by someone from a local organization for farming called ‘Helping Afghan Farmers Organization’. This organization made a program for the radio, talking about how the snails were dealt with in other countries.

Farid decided to try one of the methods from the program. All the egg shells were kept, dried and crushed up like grains of sand. Then a little of this sort of sand was sprinkled around the base of each growing young plant. The snails did not like this grainy texture and did not cross over it to climb up the plants anymore. By these ways, their garden was saved.

In this story Farid and his family learn that help or improvement cannot come without people taking initiative or taking part themselves. In this way they are part of civil society. That is, people who work together to solve a communal problem, people who speak up for others who cannot help themselves, people who will not let a problem be ignored by the leaders.

**Discussion questions:** Farid’s garden and civil society

In the story which people or which groups can be described as being part of civil society? Is the representative part of civil society? Is the journalist part of civil society? Which activities can be described as being part of civil society? We know what work needs to be done in a garden, but what work needs to be done in Afghanistan? Farid cannot do all the work in the garden by himself; can the government do all the work in the Afghanistan alone? Ask the group if they can think of any other examples of organizations or activities that are part of civil society? In what ways do women take part in civil society?

**Break for Refreshments**

**Work in groups of three:** The group is divided into threes (trios). Each trio is given a ‘task’ and asked to think about how this task is being accomplished in their community. The group leader can create her own tasks or she can select one from the list below. Together they should discuss ways in which ordinary people could help to achieve the task. After 5 or 10 minutes maximum, one person from each trio tells the whole group what they suggest. The group leader can help with some ideas and examples if needed.

1. Task: *We have no doctor in our town and we need a health clinic. What can we do?* Starting suggestion: Write a letter to the government health ministry requesting a visit and urgent funding.

2. Task: *We need a proper road. What can we do?* Starting suggestion: Collect a long list of signatures from people who want a road built or fixed and send it to the local government representative. Or write a letter to the government and a newspaper explaining why your town deserves a road. Ask for a reply.

3. Task: *We have a teacher for our children but there is not enough money for food or materials. What can we do?* Starting suggestion: Give a
few hours help for free to hand-make materials for the school; or work
in the school fruit and vegetable garden. Or find out about alternative
ways like radio schools or Montessori schools, these need fewer bought
materials.

4. Task: We need to find a solution to the drugs problem. What can we do?
Starting suggestion: Organize a youth meeting and invite a speaker to
give a drugs-awareness talk. Work with an organization to enable your
families to be independent of the drug trade.

5. Task: We want to sell our organic honey abroad? What can we do?
Starting suggestion: Find out the legal requirements for exporting from
Afghanistan and if there are any government offices that will help you
establish trade. Or set up your own website on the Internet to advertise
your product.

Show a picture: 'Civil Society'
This picture is on page 46. This shows one woman reading a newspaper to
other women who cannot read themselves. The group leader can hold up the
picture and show it to the group. She explains that though it is difficult, women
can participate in civil society even in small way. What small ways can women
participate in civil society?

Something to think about: The group leader says “Has anyone in the group
been helped by a civil society organization? When and how? How did this make
a difference to you? What skills do you have that you can share? Probably
more than you think. This is a little quote; think about it what it means, when
you are at home.

“IT is one of the most beautiful compensations of this life that no man can
sincerely try to help another without helping himself.”  
(Ralph Waldo Emerson)
SESSION FOUR: HUMAN RIGHTS

Thinking About Human Rights in Daily Life

Activity: Discussions and exercises for a workshop
Goal: To give a brief introduction to the source of human rights and to give them relevance to everyday life.
Time required: 2 hours minimum and 3 hours maximum.
Materials required: Comfortable and quiet sitting area for 6 up to 15 women with some space to move around. A clock, watch or something to measure time. Small amount of food and drink for refreshments.

Instructions:
Participants enter and are seated in a circle. The group leader welcomes the group and gives the title and aim of the session. She asks the group what they already know about human rights. If necessary, she can explain what human rights are and where they come from using chapter four of this book. If the group knows a lot, then perhaps the first exercise will not be necessary.

Read a text aloud: Universal Declaration of Human Rights

The new constitution in Afghanistan includes the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. This means these human rights are now law in Afghanistan and the government is bound to uphold them. This law provides for an enormous range of rights for every man, woman and child within a country. These are so wide-ranging that they affect every aspect of the life of an ordinary person, without them even realizing it.

The group leader should continue to read aloud the extracts from the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. This can be found on pages 93 in the form of a poster. The group leader can cut it out and use in the workshop so that all the group members can see it. She can pass it around, or make photocopies if possible.

Discussion questions: Universal Declaration of Human Rights

The group leader can help the members to connect these human rights with their everyday life. She asks them if their families already follow these rules? If no, how would their lives be if they did? How can they ensure that these rules are followed? To stimulate discussion, the group leader can use these examples from the following list of some of the practices that cause women to suffer in Afghanistan. She can ask members to find the parts of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights that forbid these practices?

- Girls in Afghanistan are often forced to marry before the legal age.
- Girls are obliged to marry someone they do not know, or someone they explicitly do not want to marry.
- Young women (and men) are prevented from marrying the person they wish to marry.
- Wives are beaten by their husband or other members of his family.
- Wives are not allowed to leave the house without permission.
- Wives are forced to work in the family household from early in the morning until late at night.
- One person telling lies about her can destroy a woman's reputation.
Under the **Universal Declaration of Human Rights**, these are some of the rights people in Afghanistan now have:

- The right to life, liberty and security;
- The right to be treated equally before the law, even if you are poor or have low status;
- The right to a full and fair public hearing to determine your guilt or innocence if you are accused of a crime;
- The right to be presumed innocent until found guilty by a fair and legal court (if you are accused of a crime);
- The right to move and live freely within your country, and to use a passport to travel to other countries;
- The right to seek asylum in other countries if you are persecuted;
- The right to have a nationality;
- The right to marry and to start a family, no matter what religion or ethnicity you are and not be forced into marriage against your will.
- The right to own property and not to have your property taken away arbitrarily;
- The right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion. This includes the freedom to change religion as well as the right to worship;
- The right to freedom of opinion and expression;
- The right to take part in the government of your country, directly or through freely chosen representatives;
- The right to work and to have equal pay for that work whether you are a man or a woman;
- The right to rest and leisure, including periodic paid holidays and not excessive working hours;
- The right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of you and your family, including food, housing, clothing and medical care;
- The right to special care and assistance to protect motherhood and childhood. All children shall enjoy the same social protection.
- The right to education, which should be free and compulsory at the elementary stage;
- The right to take part in the cultural life of your community.
- The right not be held in slavery or servitude;
- The right not be tortured;
- The right not be arbitrarily arrested or imprisoned;
- The right not have your privacy interfered with or your honor and reputation attacked.

*Please note:* The above extracts from the Universal Declaration on Human Rights are shortened and simplified versions of the actual articles. For interested women, the complete legal text can be found in Chapter 4 of the *Our Country – My Role* handbook.
Break for refreshments

Read a text aloud: Real life human rights

It is one thing to have certain rights on paper, and quite another to actually find them respected in real life. You may find that others in your surroundings – your neighbors, your local leaders, and even some members of your family – still think differently. Or, they may not have thought about these matters at all. In a family or with people you know, talking things through is often the best approach. People do things in a certain way because they think it is good, and right. If you can explain that another way is better, and will make everyone happier and more successful in their lives, you might get them to agree with you.

Once a country is normalized and functioning properly, your rights are protected by the law, which in turn is protected by the police and the courts. If people try to take away your rights, you can then go to the police for help, or sue the person in a court of law, or take other such measures depending on the particular case. However, Afghanistan is still in the process of building its police and its court system, and things are not yet working as they should and as they one day will. By discussing these issues with people around you, you can make this good day arrive more quickly.

Role play activity: Real life human rights.
The group leader divides the group into smaller groups of three. She asks for participants to take on the characters from each role play scenario. In each scenario, one character feels that her rights are not being respected and consults two others to find a resolution to the problem. There are four scenarios here and the group leader can chose which ones are most useful for the group. The 'characters' arrange themselves in a semi circle in front of the rest of the group and play out a conversation they might have to reach a resolution to the problem. The group leader should manage these role plays, offer help if the conversation is difficult or stop the role play if it is becoming unreasonable or too long. Either way each role play should be no longer than 20 minutes. At the end, the whole group is asked to comment on the resolution of the problem.

Role play one: Nazifa has given birth to non-identical twins. One baby is boy and one is a girl. Her mother in law tells Nazifa that she may not have enough breast milk for two babies and that she should only feed the boy. Nazifa feels that both babies have the right to be breast-fed but wants to avoid conflict in the family. She decides to talk to her family about it when they are having tea in the afternoon and the babies are sleeping.

Characters:
Nazifa – the mother of twins who knows her human rights
Malika – the mother in law who is very religious
Karim – son of Malika and husband of Nazifa, he tends a large flock of goats for the family.

Role play two: Bobani is 18 years old, a young unmarried daughter who has nearly completed high school. During her studies, it is clear that she is very talented with languages and she wants to become an interpreter and one day work for an international organization. Bobani's mother and father are very loving but are concerned that Bobani is thinking about a career or working away from the family, especially with foreigners. They are worried about their reputation as parents and think
their daughter should be satisfied with a life at home. Bobani decides to talk to them over the evening meal.

**Characters:**
Bobani – 18 years old, unmarried high school student  
Mother – works as a seamstress  
Father – works in the government offices

**Role play three:** Soraya, a widow, helps to deliver babies in the area. She is known for her experience and skilled use of medicinal herbs. Many families have called on her services over the years and she has become a well respected. When Soraya learns that there will be a new local National Solidarity Program in her municipality, Soraya thinks she could really contribute to the program. She tells her family that she intends to see if she can get a job there. Her brother and his wife, whom she lives with, are shocked and don’t approve. Her brother thinks that she already has a lot of freedom and that she should be grateful for their generosity and not make problems for them.

**Characters:**
Soraya – 33 years old, widow, midwife  
Moshref – Soraya’s younger brother, a butcher  
Noorie – Moshref’s wife, tends the home and their children

**Role play four:** Afifa’s two children have died when they were a few months old. Afifa’s doesn’t know why her babies died but Elham her husband blamed her. Elham wants a son and he is angry with Afifa because she does not become pregnant. He has often struck Afifa when he was very angry and now Afifa feels scared and ashamed and depressed. One day, a close friend of Afifa, tells her that her husband has no right to beat her. They decide to go and talk to the local Imam/village elder to see if he can help.

**Characters:**
Afifa – 24 years old, tends the home, is regularly beaten by her husband  
Weeda – close friend of Afifa, she knows her human rights  
Iman/village elder – a good person, who knows Elham well

**Show a picture:** Human rights in Afghanistan  
The group leader shows the group the picture: human rights in Afghanistan. This can be found on page 57. It shows a man, a women and a child releasing three white doves into the air, these are the birds of peace. There are the colored ribbons from the afghan flag around the people, to suggest that human rights laws in the Afghan constitution protect them.

**Something to think about:**
The group leader can end the session by informing the group of the addresses of any local organizations that can advise individuals if they feel that their human rights are being violated. For example, the nearest office for the Amnesty International or Human Rights Watch or the Global Rights office.

She can then say to the group:
"When you are at home or have a moment of peace, remember what you have learned about human rights and then consider this traditional Wolof saying 'Mankind is the cure for Mankind'."
SESSION FIVE: OUR COUNTRY – MY ROLE

Thinking About my Role in Politics and Public Life

Activity: Discussions and exercises for a workshop
Goal: Encourage women to find a direct connection between their daily lives and their part in the political process.
Time required: 1 hour minimum - 2 hours maximum.
Materials required: Comfortable and quiet sitting area for 6 up to 15 women. A small amount of food and drink for refreshments.

Instructions:

Participants enter and are seated in a circle. The group leader welcomes the group and gives the title and aim of the session. This is the final session of the workshops.

Read a text aloud: Thinking about the role of women in society

Consider the role of women in society in these two descriptions of women's life.

1. With the exception of fetching water and washing clothes, all tasks outside the home are carried out by men or boys. On the other hand, the women participate in all domestic tasks, including house-building and repair work. The women have the longest working day in most homes, working from five in the morning until nine in the evening. They start the day's work before dawn by making breakfast for the men who are going to work, and then feed and milk the animals. It takes a couple of hours to make the dough and bake bread, washing clothes and bathing babies and infants. Midday dinner is then prepared. After the evening meal and the washing up, work continues on the handicrafts. The young women do the heavy housework, clean the courtyard and collect the manure, which they dry in the sun and use for fuel. If they do not have big children to do this for them, the women walk to get the water. Special pathways are followed to avoid being exposed to the attention of the adult male community. Men and older boys ensure that purdah is observed, which means checking on who enters the compound and which of the younger women leave it for places other than nearby houses and the water source. If other men visit, they also ensure that women of childbearing age are hidden from the view of the guests. If a woman in purdah has to go to the health center, her husband escorts her there or finds someone else to go with her.

2. Throughout the 1980's women continued to be engaged in formal politics and participated in the different ranks of the government. Although there were no women in the council of ministers, in 1989 there were seven female members in the National Assembly as well as women in prominent positions such as the president of the women's council, and a chief surgeon to the military hospital. At this time, there were also women employed as flight attendants for the national airline and female radio and television announcers. Women worked as journalists, camera women, and in the printing house for text books. There were women in the security, intelligence, and the police agencies, and women
parachutists and even women veterinarians. Women and men worked together in the same offices and could travel in the same busses. They visited restaurants and went to the cinema. The women's council organized social services and helped many women to learn how to read, type, hair dress and sew. They supported women, through advice and legal representation. The Ministry of Public health had special mother and child programs for the prevention of diseases, vaccinations, for breast feeding and family planning.

**Discussion questions:** Thinking about the role of women in society

The group leader can explain that both descriptions are about Afghan women, at approximately the same time in history. Are the participants surprised to see such a difference? What was the important role of the women in both groups? What issues were important to them? How where they able to influence their situation? Were their human rights being respected? In what ways were the women from both groups able to get information, support or exchange ideas? How do you think the women in the second description managed to fulfill their domestic chores and work outside the house? Do you think that the dignity of women in the both descriptions is the same – or does one group have more or less than the other?

**Read a text aloud:** What can I do?

Throughout the whole of history and especially in modern history, there were women who were brave, determined and believed that they could make an important contribution to society. And they were right. From great queens, poets, scientist, explorers, musicians, activists and artists, there were women who faced great obstacles in their society and left a lasting impression.

Women around the world have organized themselves and worked to improve their lives and the lives around them. In some countries it is almost taken for granted that women and men earn the same, have paid holidays from work, have access to life-long education, can take time off from work when they have small children and have a pension. They have rights to own property, to buy and sell goods, to travel freely and to choose how to live their own lives. Even in the countries neighboring to Afghanistan, more women can read and write, fewer babies and children die, fewer mothers die in child birth and there are more doctors. All these changes to the quality of their lives are due to the continual work of men and women working together, in government, in civil society and in homes.

There have been women in Afghanistan and outside of Afghanistan who have organized themselves, campaigned for change, for choice and fairness. From well-known women in history to more recent examples: women who went to the Bonn Conference, women who represented the districts at the loya jirgas and women who participate in the government bodies now, in the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Women, preparing for the elections and working in non-governmental organizations. All these women have an opportunity to bring their talents and qualities to the task of rebuilding Afghanistan. However, do not forget that ordinary women have a role to play in shaping their present and their future too. There are no quick solutions to the problems of Afghanistan. People in Afghanistan have to ask themselves: what is my role in our country? Every woman must ask herself: what can I do?
Women all around the world, as mothers, daughters, sisters and wives, are the main care-givers in society. They raise the children, cook and clean, they are healers in the families and pass the knowledge of the home from one generation to another. Some women are even very powerful within the community. That is exactly why it is important that our voices are heard when decisions are made about the future of our country. And now that Afghanistan is a democracy, women have the opportunity – along with the women of forty-four other Islamic states in the world – to bring their voices into the political processes.

This is a good place for the group leader to mention that in autumn 2004, there will be one opportunity to actively contribute to the rebuilding of their country – the opportunity to vote at the national level.

(Optional) Visual activity: Every single vote counts
For this exercise, the group leader can fill a cup on a saucer with water or tea, until the liquid is nearly at the brim. She asks each member of the group to pour a small teaspoon of water into the cup. The group will see that the liquid stays at the brim for a while and then with one last teaspoon, the water flows over the top and spills into the saucer.

The group leader can say this to the group: 'What do you think this game teaches us? With all the water in the cup, only one teaspoon of water can make the difference between a full cup and the cup spilling over. Sometimes women feel that their participation in an election does not really matter, or would not make a difference, especially when millions of other people are eligible to vote. It's easy to think this, but it's not true. Sometimes the difference between a candidate who wins and a candidate who loses is only a handful of votes, one of which might be yours. Every single vote counts and makes a difference'.

Show a picture: Five Good Reasons
The group leader can hold up the picture on page 68. It shows a hand, with fingers outstretched and small pictures by the side of each finger. The group leader asks the participants to hold up one hand as a fist, she asks them to stretch out each finger as she names it, according to the list below. She can say:

"With this picture you can easily remind yourself and others of five good reasons for women to participate in politics and civil society.

Thumb – Like thumbs and fingers, women and men are different but worth the same. It's best when all work together. The thumb reminds you to bring the voice of women into the political processes. Voting is like speaking your mind – no vote equals no voice

Qalam finger – This finger reminds us that in Islam, we have equal rights and responsibilities. An important responsibility is to decide on your government.

Middle finger – The longest finger points the way to a brighter future in Afghanistan. Women's talents are needed to improve life for all. Women should vote for a good candidate who will work to improve conditions and resolve the problems of Afghanistan.

Ring finger – This finger signifies the legal binding between man and woman and stands for the law. It reminds women to stand up for their human rights and to promote the rule of law in Afghanistan."
**Little finger** – This finger reminds us of our children. You have an interest in who is running your government and in the decisions that affect you and your family. Each woman must decide for herself how much she is able to join in the rebuilding of Afghanistan, but even the smallest effort will be a gift to the next generation.

The group leader can repeat this exercise several times to help memorize it, as it will be a good reminder for the participants once they have left the workshop.

**Something to think about: Our Country – My Role**

To signal the end of the session, the group leader can say: "After attending this workshop you might be inspired to take an active role in helping to rebuild your society. By taking part in public life; by networking with others; by contributing to civil society; by promoting the rule of law and human rights; and by setting a good example to others.

It is up to you how active you can become, and what form that activity may take. You can be highly active, or not participate at all. But it is important that you are aware that you have an impact no matter which way you choose – for good or bad. In a democratic society, the choice is yours to make.

Thank you for attending these workshops. If you have found them useful, please share your experience with others."
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Our Country My Role
An International Initiative for the Inclusion of Women in Politics and Civil Society

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