



The Challenges and Opportunities of the Afghanistan Women Chamber of Commerce and Industries (AWCCI) Post August 15, 2021: A Research Proposal

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Abstract

The collapse of the republic government in Afghanistan and the subsequent rise of the Taliban regime has led to the suppression of women's rights and limited their activities to business endeavors. The Women's Chamber of Commerce, represented by the Afghanistan Women Chamber of Commerce and Industries (AWCCI), emerged as the primary institution supporting women's economic participation. Consequently, it is crucial to assess whether AWCCI can effectively cover all women's activities nationwide and operate as a comprehensive platform for all Afghan women.

Key Words: Afghanistan, women, Taliban, business, empowerment.

Introduction

The dynamic and unpredictable context of Afghanistan raises concerns about the sustainability of AWCCI's efforts in the face of potential future decrees or suspensions that may impact women's business activities. This research paper aims to address these challenges and provide solutions for ensuring the successful operation and support of Afghanistan Women Chamber of Commerce and Industries (AWCCI) in empowering Afghan women in business.

The problem statement elaborates on the challenges faced by the Women's Chamber of Commerce, known as AWCCI, in Afghanistan following the collapse of the republic government and the rise of the Taliban regime. The Taliban's decrees have suppressed women's rights, leaving business activities as one of the few spaces where women can actively participate. AWCCI, established in 2014 by a group of businesswomen, was closed after the regime change but was later reopened under the authorization and supervision of the Ministry of Commerce.

The first challenge to be addressed is whether AWCCI can effectively cover and support all women's activities across the country. With 56% of Afghanistan's population being women, it is crucial to assess whether AWCCI's reach and services are comprehensive enough to cater to the diverse needs and aspirations of women entrepreneurs and business professionals in different regions.

The second challenge relates to the unpredictable and dynamic context of Afghanistan. The research paper aims to explore the potential risks and uncertainties that may affect AWCCI's operations and its ability to empower women in business. This includes examining the possibility of future decrees or suspensions that could hinder women's activities and impact AWCCI's functioning.

By addressing these challenges, the research paper seeks to provide insights and recommendations to ensure the successful operation and support of AWCCI. It aims to find ways to strengthen AWCCI's effectiveness in promoting women's economic participation, resilience in the face of potential obstacles, and the sustainability of its efforts in empowering Afghan women in business.

Literature Review

The literature review aims to provide an overview of existing research, scholarly articles, reports, and relevant documents related to women's economic participation, the establishment and functioning of AWCCI (Women Chamber of Commerce) in Afghanistan, and the impact of the Taliban regime on women's rights and business activities. It explores the historical context, challenges, and potential solutions for empowering Afghan women in business through the support of AWCCI.

Women's Economic Participation in Afghanistan

Numerous studies have highlighted the historical challenges faced by Afghan women in accessing economic opportunities. Factors such as gender norms, cultural barriers, and limited access to education and resources have traditionally limited women's participation in business and entrepreneurship (Kabeer, 2005; World Bank, 2018). However, in recent years, efforts have been made to empower women economically, including the establishment of organizations like AWCCI.

AWCCI: Establishment and Coverage

AWCCI was established in 2014 by a group of businesswomen with the aim of promoting women's economic participation and entrepreneurship in Afghanistan. It initially faced challenges but was later reopened under the authorization and supervision of the Ministry of Commerce. AWCCI has been recognized as the primary institution supporting women's business activities, providing services such as training, mentorship, networking, and advocacy (Safi, 2019). However, the extent of AWCCI's coverage and effectiveness in reaching women across different regions of Afghanistan remains a question for investigation.

Impact of the Taliban Regime on Women's Rights and Business Activities

The rise of the Taliban regime and their decrees have had a significant impact on women's rights and freedoms in Afghanistan. Under their rule, women have faced severe

restrictions on their mobility, education, and employment opportunities (United Nations, 2021). The research aims to explore how the Taliban's decrees specifically affect women's economic participation and the functioning of AWCCI, considering the limited spaces where women can actively engage in business activities.

Challenges and Risks Faced by AWCCI

The study acknowledges the challenges faced by AWCCI in effectively catering to the diverse needs and aspirations of women entrepreneurs and business professionals. These challenges may include limited resources, regional disparities, and cultural barriers (Safi, 2019). Additionally, the dynamic and unpredictable context of Afghanistan poses risks and uncertainties that may impact the sustainability of AWCCI's efforts in empowering women in business. Understanding these challenges and risks is crucial for suggesting appropriate solutions.

Empowering Afghan Women Entrepreneurs: Lessons from International Experiences

This study examines successful initiatives and best practices from other countries that have aimed to empower women entrepreneurs. It provides insights into strategies, policies, and support systems that can be adapted and implemented in the context of Afghanistan to enhance the effectiveness of AWCCI and promote women's economic participation (UN Women, 2017).

The Role of Women's Chambers of Commerce in Empowering Women Entrepreneurs

This study explores the role and impact of women's chambers of commerce in empowering women entrepreneurs globally. It analyzes the functions, services, and strategies employed by these organizations and their contribution to women's economic empowerment. The findings can inform the efforts of AWCCI in Afghanistan (Gupta & Singh, 2016).

Gender and Entrepreneurship in Fragile Contexts: The Case of Afghanistan

This study focuses specifically on the challenges and opportunities faced by women entrepreneurs in fragile contexts, using Afghanistan as a case study. It examines the socio-cultural barriers, institutional constraints, and support mechanisms available to women entrepreneurs. The research sheds light on the unique context of Afghanistan and the potential strategies to overcome barriers and promote women's economic participation (Ghazanfar & Imran, 2019).

Women's Economic Empowerment and Business Resilience in Conflict-Affected Contexts

This research explores the relationship between women's economic empowerment and business resilience in conflict-affected contexts. It discusses the importance of supporting women's economic participation as a means to enhance their resilience in the face of challenges, including political instability and security risks. The findings have implications for AWCCI's efforts to empower Afghan women in business (UN Women, 2016).

The Impact of Women's Business Networks on Entrepreneurial Success

This study examines the role and impact of women's business networks on the entrepreneurial success of women. It investigates how networking opportunities, mentorship, and access to resources through such networks can contribute to women's business growth and resilience. The findings provide insights into the potential benefits of strengthening networking initiatives within AWCCI (Brush, 2018).

Women's Economic Empowerment and Sustainable Development in Afghanistan

This research analyzes the linkages between women's economic empowerment and sustainable development in Afghanistan. It explores the economic, social, and environmental dimensions of women's empowerment and highlights the importance of supporting women's economic activities for achieving broader sustainable development goals. The findings inform the need for strengthening AWCCI's initiatives in promoting women's economic participation for sustainable development (United Nations Development Programme, 2019).

The literature review highlights the importance of AWCCI in supporting women's economic participation in Afghanistan and emphasizes the need to assess its coverage and effectiveness across different regions. The impact of the Taliban regime on women's rights and the functioning of AWCCI adds urgency to the investigation. By addressing the challenges and risks faced by AWCCI, the research paper aims to provide insights and recommendations for strengthening its operations and supporting Afghan women in business, thereby ensuring their empowerment and long-term sustainability.

These additional literature sources provide further insights into empowering women entrepreneurs, the role of women's chambers of commerce, the specific context of Afghanistan, the relationship between economic empowerment and resilience, the impact of business networks, and the connection between women's empowerment and sustainable development. Incorporating these sources will enrich the literature review and contribute to a comprehensive understanding of the research topic.

Research Questions and Corresponding Hypotheses

The proposed research questions and hypotheses for this study are:

Research Question 1: What is the extent of AWCCI's coverage and support for women's activities across different regions in Afghanistan?

Hypothesis 1: AWCCI's coverage and support for women's activities vary significantly across different regions in Afghanistan due to differences in infrastructure, cultural norms, and accessibility to resources.

Research Question 2: How has the rise of the Taliban regime and their decrees impacted women's economic participation and the functioning of AWCCI?

Hypothesis 2: The rise of the Taliban regime and their decrees have severely restricted women's economic participation, leading to a significant decline in their involvement in business activities. This has also hindered the functioning of AWCCI, reducing its effectiveness and capacity to support women in business.

Research Question 3: What are the potential risks and uncertainties that may affect AWCCI's operations and its ability to empower women in business in the dynamic and unpredictable context of Afghanistan?

Hypothesis 3: AWCCI faces risks of security threats and violence, which may hinder its operations and limit its ability to provide support to women entrepreneurs. Additionally, political instability and frequent changes in government policies and regulations pose uncertainties that can impact AWCCI's operations and its long-term sustainability.

Research Question 4: How can AWCCI strengthen its effectiveness in promoting women's economic participation and resilience in the face of potential obstacles, ensuring the sustainability of its efforts in empowering Afghan women in business?

Hypothesis 4: AWCCI can enhance its effectiveness by establishing partnerships with international organizations and leveraging their resources and expertise to expand its reach and impact. Furthermore, AWCCI can develop tailored training programs and initiatives that address the specific needs and challenges faced by women entrepreneurs in Afghanistan, thereby promoting their resilience and long-term success.

Methodology

The proposed methodology for addressing the challenges faced by the Afghan Women's Chamber of Commerce and Industry (AWCCI) in empowering women in business in Afghanistan includes a mixed-method research approach. This approach combines both qualitative and quantitative methods to gather comprehensive data and provide a holistic understanding of the situation. The specific methodologies that can be employed within this approach are statistical analysis (quantitative) and structured interviews (qualitative).

Statistical Analysis (Quantitative)

Statistical analysis involves the collection and analysis of numerical data to identify patterns, trends, and relationships. This methodology can be beneficial in examining various quantitative factors related to women in business in Afghanistan, such as the number of women-owned businesses, their contribution to the economy, challenges faced, and the impact of specific interventions. By using statistical analysis, researchers can generate objective data that can be used to inform policy recommendations and measure progress over time. This method provides a quantitative perspective on the issue, allowing for comparisons and generalizations.

Structured Interviews (Qualitative)

Structured interviews involve conducting one-on-one interviews with predetermined questions and a fixed format. This methodology allows researchers to gather qualitative data by

directly engaging with the participants, such as Afghan women entrepreneurs and stakeholders in the business community. Structured interviews can provide valuable insights into the experiences, perspectives, and challenges faced by women in business. This method allows for in-depth exploration of individual experiences, motivations, and aspirations, providing a deeper understanding of the issues at hand.

Data Analysis

The collected data from surveys, interviews, and case studies will be analyzed using a mixed-methods approach. Quantitative data from surveys will be analyzed using statistical techniques such as descriptive statistics, correlation analysis, and inferential statistics to identify patterns, trends, and relationships. Qualitative data from interviews and case studies will be transcribed, coded, and analyzed thematically to identify key themes, insights, and recommendations. The integration of quantitative and qualitative findings will provide a comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the research questions and enable triangulation of results.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations will be upheld throughout the research process. Informed consent will be obtained from all participants, and their confidentiality and anonymity will be maintained. The research will adhere to ethical guidelines, ensuring the well-being and rights of the participants. Additionally, necessary permissions and approvals will be sought from relevant authorities and organizations to conduct the research.

The proposed research methodology, incorporating a literature review, surveys, interviews, and case studies, will provide a comprehensive and multi-faceted understanding of the challenges faced by AWCCI and the impact of its efforts in empowering Afghan women in business. The mixed-methods approach will enable the integration of quantitative and qualitative data, enhancing the validity and reliability of the research findings.

Data Collection

The number of participants needed for the research will depend on the specific research objectives and resources available. For the statistical analysis, a larger sample size may be desirable to ensure statistical validity and generalizability of the findings. This could involve collecting data from a representative sample of women-owned businesses across different regions of Afghanistan. The sample size can be determined using statistical power analysis techniques to ensure adequate statistical significance. The estimation sample could be around 7-100 businesswomen, but it depends on resources.

For structured interviews, a smaller number of participants may be sufficient, typically ranging from 10 to 20 individuals. The focus is on obtaining rich and detailed information from each participant, allowing for a deeper understanding of their experiences and perspectives. The selection of participants should aim for diversity in terms of business sectors, geographic locations, and levels of experience to capture a range of experiences and challenges faced by Afghan women in business.

By employing both quantitative and qualitative methods, researchers can complement each other's strengths and weaknesses. The statistical analysis provides numerical data and allows for generalizations, while structured interviews provide nuanced insights into the lived experiences of women entrepreneurs. This mixed-method approach will provide a comprehensive understanding of the challenges faced by the AWCCI and help formulate effective strategies for empowering women in business in Afghanistan.

The data collection process will involve accessing existing literature and documents for the literature review, designing and administering surveys and questionnaires to around 100 participants, conducting in-depth interviews with approximately five key stakeholders, and conducting case studies of selected women entrepreneurs.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the problem statement highlights the challenges faced by the Women's Chamber of Commerce (AWCCI) in Afghanistan following the collapse of the republic government and the rise of the Taliban regime. The suppression of women's rights and the limited spaces for their participation have made AWCCI's role in supporting women's economic activities crucial. However, it is essential to assess the organization's coverage and effectiveness in reaching women across different regions of Afghanistan, as well as its sustainability in the face of potential future decrees or suspensions impacting women's business activities.

The literature review provides a comprehensive overview of the existing research, highlighting the historical challenges faced by Afghan women in accessing economic opportunities. It also explores the establishment and functioning of AWCCI and the impact of the Taliban regime on women's rights and business activities. The review identifies various challenges and risks faced by AWCCI, including limited resources, regional disparities, and cultural barriers. Furthermore, it emphasizes the importance of understanding successful international initiatives, the role of women's chambers of commerce, and the relationship between women's economic empowerment and sustainable development.

By addressing these challenges and risks, the research paper aims to provide insights and recommendations to strengthen AWCCI's operations and support Afghan women in business. The findings from the additional literature sources, which explore successful initiatives from other countries, the role of women's chambers of commerce, and the unique context of Afghanistan, will further enrich the research and contribute to a comprehensive understanding of the topic.

Overall, the research paper seeks to ensure the successful operation and support of AWCCI in empowering Afghan women in business. By addressing the challenges, assessing the organization's coverage and effectiveness, and exploring potential risks, the research aims to provide actionable recommendations that can enhance AWCCI's role in promoting women's economic participation, resilience, and long-term sustainability in Afghanistan.

Limitations of the research proposal may include:

- Availability and reliability of existing data: The study's accuracy and comprehensiveness depend on the quality and availability of relevant data sources.
- Limited generalizability: The findings may be specific to the Afghan context and may not be directly applicable to other regions or countries.

- Potential bias: There may be limitations in participant selection, such as underrepresentation of certain groups or biases in self-reporting.
- Time and resource constraints: The study's scope may be limited by time, budget, and available resources, which could affect the comprehensiveness and depth of the research.

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Appendix A – Qualitative Interview and Survey Questions

Main Questions:

1. What is the extent of AWCCI's coverage and support for women's activities across different regions in Afghanistan?
2. How has the rise of the Taliban regime and their decrees impacted women's economic participation and the functioning of AWCCI?
3. What are the potential risks and uncertainties that may affect AWCCI's operations and its ability to empower women in business in the dynamic and unpredictable context of Afghanistan?
4. How can AWCCI strengthen its effectiveness in promoting women's economic participation and resilience in the face of potential obstacles, ensuring the sustainability of its efforts in empowering Afghan women in business?

Sub-Questions:

- 1.1. What are the specific services and support offered by AWCCI to women entrepreneurs and business professionals?
- 1.2. To what extent does AWCCI's coverage and support reach women in different regions of Afghanistan?
- 1.3. Are there any regional disparities in terms of AWCCI's effectiveness and support?
- 2.1. How have the Taliban's decrees impacted the rights and freedoms of women in Afghanistan, particularly in relation to business activities?
- 2.2. What specific challenges has AWCCI faced following the regime change and the rise of the Taliban?
- 2.3. In what ways has AWCCI adapted its operations and strategies to navigate the new socio-political landscape under the Taliban regime?
- 3.1. What are the potential threats or obstacles that AWCCI may encounter in its operations or support for women in business?
- 3.2. How might changes in government policies or regulations impact AWCCI's functioning and its ability to empower women in business?
- 3.3. What are the uncertainties and risks associated with the dynamic context of Afghanistan that may affect AWCCI's sustainability?
- 4.1. What strategies can AWCCI implement to enhance its support for women entrepreneurs and business professionals?
- 4.2. How can AWCCI strengthen its advocacy efforts to promote women's economic participation and rights?
- 4.3. What collaborations or partnerships can AWCCI establish to ensure the long-term sustainability and impact of its initiatives for empowering Afghan women in business?

These sub-questions will be used in survey and will help further explore and address specific aspects related to the main research questions, providing a more comprehensive analysis and understanding of the challenges and solutions associated with AWCCI's operations and support for Afghan women in business.

Appendix B – Data Collection Plan and Details

To address the research objectives and support the mixed-method research approach, the following specific data needed:

1. Quantitative Data:

- Number of women-owned businesses in Afghanistan
- Financial data and economic contributions of women-owned businesses
- Employment and workforce statistics related to women in business.
- Data on access to finance, resources, and support for women entrepreneurs
- Information on existing policies, programs, and initiatives supporting women in business.

2. Qualitative Data:

- Experiences, challenges, and success stories of women entrepreneurs
- Perspectives of stakeholders in the business community, including government officials, industry leaders, and support organizations
- Factors influencing women's participation in business and barriers they face
- Views on the effectiveness of existing initiatives and recommendations for improvement

To collect the data, a combination of methods can be employed:

1. Quantitative Data Collection:

- Gathering existing data from government agencies, research organizations, and industry reports.
- Conducting surveys or questionnaires targeting women-owned businesses, aiming for a representative sample across different regions and sectors.
- Extracting data from financial and economic databases, if available.

2. Qualitative Data Collection:

- Conducting structured interviews with women entrepreneurs and stakeholders using a predetermined set of questions to ensure consistency and comparability.
- Organizing focus group discussions with women entrepreneurs to encourage group dynamics and facilitate deeper insights.
- Collecting relevant documents, reports, and case studies related to women in business.

Resources required for the study may include:

- Research team: Researchers with expertise in quantitative and qualitative methods, data analysis, and knowledge of the Afghan business environment.
- Research tools: Questionnaires, interview guides, and data collection templates.
- Technology: Computers, data analysis software, and communication tools for data management and analysis.

- Access to relevant databases, reports, and documents.
- Potential travel and accommodation expenses if fieldwork or in-person interviews are necessary.

Participant recruitment can be done through various channels:

- Collaboration with the Afghan Women's Chamber of Commerce and Industry (AWCCI) to reach out to their members and networks.
- Engaging with business associations, industry groups, and support organizations to identify potential participants.
- Utilizing online platforms, social media, and professional networks to disseminate recruitment announcements.
- Regarding gifts and incentives, it is important to consider ethical considerations and potential biases they may introduce. Offering incentives may influence participant responses and attract individuals solely motivated by the gift rather than genuine interest in the study. It is advisable to prioritize voluntary participation and ensure that participants fully understand the purpose and benefits of their involvement.