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30 /08/2025

Afghanistan: Crises, Challenges, and Pathways to Sustainable Development

Preface

Afghanistan has endured a series of complex and multilayered crises over the past decades. The concentration of power in the hands of limited groups, widespread deprivation of education, economic dependence on external resources, and the absence of an inclusive constitutional framework have collectively hindered sustainable development and the realization of social justice. This article adopts a rigorous academic approach to examine the key crises facing the country and proposes practical and comprehensive pathways to address these challenges.

1: Political Crisis and Concentration of Power

One of Afghanistan's central challenges is the concentration of power among a limited number of groups and the persistence of tribal governance. This concentration has hindered the establishment of an inclusive and equitable political system, undermining the legitimacy of successive governments. Under such conditions, the active participation of ethnic groups, women, and youth in national decision-making is severely limited, while corruption and abuse of power proliferate. Even when opportunities arise to establish inclusive

governance, they are frequently compromised by power struggles and the preservation of historical and externally influenced political hierarchies.

Afghanistan's political history is marked by bloodshed, imprisonment, secret detentions, conspiracies, and fratricidal violence. Thousands have been killed, blinded, or imprisoned; brothers have turned against brothers, and children against parents and uncles. Historical experience demonstrates that possessing a comprehensive legal framework alone has never guaranteed political stability, justice, or the protection of citizens' rights.

From the first constitution during the reign of Zahir Shah, through reforms under Daoud Khan, the one-party rule of the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA), the era of the Mujahideen, and the U.S.-supported republican governments of Karzai and Ghani—where Mujahideen leaders occupied key civil and military posts—Afghanistan has consistently had a constitution. Despite this, the country has continued to suffer from war, ethnic strife, institutional collapse, and deep dependence on foreign powers.

Given the current situation, with Taliban forces controlling significant portions of the country, the establishment of a constitutional drafting council abroad or under international supervision cannot alone resolve the crisis. Without internal political consensus, national agreement, and mobilization of social forces, even a constitution drafted by the world's leading legal experts would be practically unenforceable.

The roots of Afghanistan's problems lie not merely in the absence of a legal document but in the lack of national will, internal consensus, mutual trust, and political independence. Until foundational issues—such as the distribution of power, the role of armed groups, and foreign interventions—are addressed, any new constitutional framework is likely to follow the fate of its predecessors.

It is also essential to acknowledge the role of past actors. The PDPA, during its 14-year rule, committed significant errors despite Soviet support. Mujahideen leaders, benefiting from backing by Pakistan, the U.S., and certain Arab countries, fared even worse. Over 35 years, they failed to deliver meaningful progress across any sector, leaving behind extensive corruption, ethnic divisions, weakened national institutions, and opportunities for foreign interference. If the PDPA is criticized for its Soviet affiliation and inefficiency, Mujahideen leaders cannot evade accountability for their own record, as history attests to their failure to build a stable future for Afghanistan.

External powers have historically played a decisive role in shaping Afghan governments, from Ahmad Shah Durrani to the present. Major political decisions

were frequently made under foreign pressure or guidance, limiting the country's political independence. Afghanistan, in practical terms, has never possessed genuine sovereignty, and any fundamental political reform must account for historical and external influences to be viable (UNDP, 2025; Afghanistan Analysts Network, 2024).

2: Educational Crisis and the Deprivation of Girls

The closure of girls' schools and restricted access to education have not only deepened generational and social divides but also reduced the capacity of a skilled workforce. The psychological, social, and economic consequences of this deprivation—particularly reduced motivation for active participation in society and the economy—have long-term implications for national development (UNESCO, 2023).

Addressing this crisis requires reopening girls' schools and implementing modern, skills-oriented educational programs. Comprehensive education and human empowerment constitute the pillars of sustainable development and can strengthen the country's social, economic, and political foundations.

3: Economic Crisis

Afghanistan's economy has faced severe constraints and high dependency on external aid for decades. A large portion of the economy relies on foreign assistance and traditional resources, making sustainable development and economic self-sufficiency challenging. The absence of institutionalized economic structures has hindered private sector growth and limited employment opportunities, particularly for youth and skilled labour (World Bank, 2024).

Strategies to address the economic crisis include developing the private and non-governmental sectors, creating employment opportunities for youth and women, and implementing programs for economic empowerment and entrepreneurship. Growth of the private sector and increased national income not only enhance social welfare but also reinforce political participation and public trust.

However, under the repressive conditions of Taliban rule, even long-term economic growth that keeps pace with population expansion is highly constrained. Poverty rates are rising, leading to higher infant mortality, while depressed youth and widespread unemployment intensify long-term social, political, health, and economic crises.

4: Social Participation and Civil Institutions

Active citizen participation is the crucial link connecting education, economic development, and sustainable growth. Without it, no policy or development initiative can succeed. Institutionalizing civil rights, ensuring participation of ethnic groups, women, and youth in national decision-making, and establishing independent civil society organizations are essential for sustainable development (Relief Web, 2025).

Empowering women and youth are particularly vital; their active engagement in social, economic, and political institutions enhances human capacity and policy effectiveness. Equal access to education and employment enables social justice and reduces ethnic and gender disparities.

5: Drafting an Inclusive Constitution

The creation and adoption of an inclusive constitution constitute a key instrument for political and social stability. A constitution provides a framework for power-sharing, guarantees citizens' rights, establishes oversight mechanisms, and lays the foundation for sustainable development (Afghanistan Constitutional Law Expert Group, 2023).

Nevertheless, drafting such a constitution without considering the country's realities, ethnic and social composition, and broad participation from all groups will be largely ineffective. Active involvement of all sectors, particularly women and youth, is essential to ensure legitimacy and sustainability.

6: Integrating Economic, Educational, and Political Development

Economic growth, particularly via the private and non-governmental sectors, provides the foundation for strong national policies and citizen participation. A robust and transparent economy helps reduce corruption, limits power concentration, and strengthens social engagement and public trust.

Education and human empowerment—especially for women and youth—constitute another critical pillar. Enhancing human capacity and modern skills enables the utilization of economic opportunities and promotes civic engagement.

A comprehensive strategy must integrate economic development, educational empowerment, and political participation to create genuine independence and sustainable development.

7: Conclusion and Future Outlook

Afghanistan can overcome its chronic crises only when domestic and international institutions and social groups collaborate in an inclusive, transparent, and equitable process. Strengthening public participation, building trust in governmental institutions, and providing equal opportunities for all citizens are essential for success.

The vision for Afghanistan's future rests on justice, participation, and human development. Drafting an inclusive constitution, fostering private sector growth, improving education, and empowering citizens—particularly women and youth—will guide the country toward stability, genuine independence, and sustainable development. This comprehensive approach represents the only viable path to address complex crises and create a responsive, equitable, and dynamic society.

Finally, navigating the existing crisis requires a national roadmap built on three key pillars

1. Removing the Taliban's monopoly on power and moving toward an inclusive, participatory government, without employing derogatory language or exacerbating political divisions.
2. Mobilizing national forces internally and fostering unity among expatriate elites abroad, independent of blind allegiance to Eastern or Western blocs.
3. Drafting a comprehensive, operational national document grounded not only in legal principles but also in national consensus and on-the-ground realities.

While a constitution is part of the solution, its precondition is genuine freedom, independent decision-making, and internal consensus. Until these elements are realized, discussions of visionary plans or a new constitution remain largely rhetorical and unlikely to resolve Afghanistan's crises in practice.

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