Women's economic participation in Bamyan: trends and challenges from 2010 to 2020

Participação econômica das mulheres em Bamyan: tendências e desafios no período de 2010 a 2020

La participación económica femenina en Bamiyán: evolución, tendencias y desafíos (2010–2020)

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Abstract

Hamdard, A. J. Firozi, S. M. Sadat, S. S. Mesbah, A. B. Women's economic participation in Bamyan: trends and challenges from 2010 to 2020. ***Rev. C&Trópico***, v. 50, n. 1, p. 17-38, 2026. Doi: 10.33148/ctrpico.v50i1.2818

With the increase in economic participation opportunities for women, the level of the society's economy will develop and women will achieve an independent income. Therefore, efforts have been made to increase the presence of women in the labor market and to play an active role in the social arena. After 2010, in Afghanistan, especially in Bamyan province, women's economic participation and access to employment opportunities have been improving, despite the many challenges and obstacles that existed in the way of women's social and economic activities at home and outside the home. The economic situation of families that have provided employment opportunities for women and has included them in the labor market has also improved. The purpose of this study is to investigate the status and level of women's economic participation in the labor market of Bamyan province and the factors affecting their employment status. This research has been conducted through the distribution of 57 questionnaires, interviews with women, and field observations of the researchers in the center of Bamyan and Yakalang Bazaar. Research findings show that cultural and social barriers, including common and prevailing beliefs about the role of women, which are rooted in societal institutions, traditions, and values, have reduced women's economic participation.

Keywords: Bamyan; Women; Economic participation; Challenges.

Resumo

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Com o aumento das oportunidades de participação econômica das mulheres, o nível da economia da sociedade se desenvolve e as mulheres passam a alcançar uma renda independente. Nesse sentido, têm sido realizados esforços para ampliar a presença das mulheres no mercado de trabalho e fortalecer seu

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papel ativo no espaço social. Após 2010, no Afeganistão, especialmente na província de Bamyan, a participação econômica feminina e o acesso a oportunidades de emprego apresentaram avanços, apesar dos inúmeros desafios e obstáculos existentes às atividades sociais e econômicas das mulheres, tanto no âmbito doméstico quanto fora dele. A situação econômica das famílias que possibilitaram o emprego das mulheres e sua inserção no mercado de trabalho também apresentou melhorias. O objetivo deste estudo é analisar a situação e o nível de participação econômica das mulheres no mercado de trabalho da província de Bamyan, bem como os fatores que influenciam sua condição de emprego. A pesquisa foi realizada por meio da aplicação de 57 questionários, entrevistas com mulheres e observações de campo conduzidas pelos pesquisadores no centro de Bamyan e no bazar de Yakalang. Os resultados da pesquisa indicam que barreiras culturais e sociais, incluindo crenças comuns e predominantes sobre o papel das mulheres, enraizadas nas instituições sociais, tradições e valores, têm reduzido a participação econômica feminina.
Palavras-chave: Bamyan; Mulheres; Participação econômica; Desafios.

Resumen

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Con el aumento de las oportunidades de participación económica de las mujeres, el nivel económico de la sociedad se desarrolla y las mujeres logran obtener ingresos independientes. Por ello, se han realizado esfuerzos para incrementar la presencia de las mujeres en el mercado laboral y para que desempeñen un papel activo en el ámbito social. Después de 2010, en Afganistán, especialmente en la provincia de Bamiyán, la participación económica femenina y el acceso a oportunidades de empleo han mejorado, a pesar de los numerosos desafíos y obstáculos que existen para las actividades sociales y económicas de las mujeres, tanto dentro como fuera del hogar. La situación económica de las familias que han brindado oportunidades de empleo a las mujeres e incluido a estas en el mercado laboral también ha mejorado. El objetivo de este estudio es investigar el estado y nivel de participación económica de las mujeres en el mercado laboral de la provincia de Bamiyán, así como los factores que afectan su situación laboral. La investigación se llevó a cabo mediante la distribución de 57 cuestionarios, entrevistas con mujeres y observaciones de campo realizadas por los investigadores en el centro de Bamiyán y en el bazar de Yakalang. Los hallazgos de la investigación muestran que las barreras culturales y sociales incluyendo creencias comunes y predominantes sobre el papel de la mujer, arraigadas en las instituciones, tradiciones y valores sociales han reducido la participación económica de las mujeres.
Palabras clave: Bamiyán; Mujeres; Participación económica; Desafíos.

Data de submissão: 30/03/2026
Data de aceite: 15/04/2026

1. Introduction and problem statement

Women, as half of the population, play a fundamental role in the process of economic, and social development of societies. In many developing countries, including Afghanistan, despite women being considered a vulnerable group, their participation in the national economy plays a vital and undeniable role. Studies show that Afghan women have always participated in economic reconstruction, strengthening social institutions and improving welfare indicators in society (Hamidi and Hamidi, 2020). However, their effective presence in economic spheres has always been accompanied by structural, cultural, and political challenges. Especially after the political changes of 2021 and the return of the Taliban to power, concerns regarding the

restrictions imposed on the social and economic roles of women have increased again (Rahimi, 2022).

Despite widespread obstacles, some provinces like Bamyan, due to their relative security and more open social structures, have provided a more favorable environment for women's participation in economic activities. After 2007, and especially in the decade from 2010 to 2021, we have witnessed a gradual increase in women's economic participation in this province. The expansion of this participation can be attributed to a combination of factors such as access to education, the activities of civil society organizations, the promotion of an entrepreneurial culture, and the support of domestic and international institutions. Bamyan women have played a role not only in traditional occupations but also as entrepreneurs, producers, and managers of small businesses.

Despite the limited progress in women's economic participation in Bamyan province, the path ahead for their entry and effective presence in economic activities continues to face structural and persistent challenges and obstacles. These challenges are not limited to economic issues; rather, they are rooted in a set of cultural, social, political, and legal factors. Traditional attitudes towards women's gender roles, family structure limitations, lack of institutional support, and weak economic infrastructure are among the factors that severely restrict women's potential to play an active role in the labor market.

In addition, issues such as limited access to large markets, lack of financial and credit support, lack of ownership of resources and assets, and absence of professional and managerial training are among the fundamental challenges in the path to economic empowerment of women in this province. Although from 2010 to 2021 women's economic participation in Bamyan has seen gradual growth and has received relative support from domestic and international institutions, this trend is still affected by chronic and deep-rooted limitations that hinder the full flourishing of women's economic potential.

In this context, a detailed examination of the trends in women's economic participation in Bamyan over the past decade, identifying the factors influencing this participation, analyzing the income levels of active women, especially in the trade and small business sectors, and evaluating the barriers and limitations they face in entering, remaining, and advancing in the labor market is of special importance.

The objective of this research is to identify the factors affecting the level of economic participation of women in Bamyan province and to analyze the obstacles, limitations, and challenges that women in this province face in their pursuit of employment and economic activities.

This research also seeks to answer questions such as the following:

What factors have influenced the level of women's economic participation in Bamyan province from 2010 to 2021?

What are the most important structural, cultural, and social barriers and limitations to women's employment and economic participation in Bamyan?

2. Theoretical framework of the research

Theoretical studies in the field of women's economic participation and employment have been primarily influenced by the Marxist theoretical framework. In this approach, Marx's methodology provides a framework for analyzing the phenomenon of women's structural oppression as a consequence of the fundamental power relations between men and women. These relationships are clearly reflected in areas such as labor organization, socioeconomic stratification, and the gendered division of labor (Gimenez,1980). The theoretical framework related to women's economic participation in the workforce is primarily based on analyzing their decision-making regarding active entry or non-entry into the labor market. In this regard, economists have attempted to explain women's tendency to participate in or withdraw from the labor market by examining economic and demographic factors. Theories that examine the supply of female labor were primarily developed in the 1960. In the meantime, we can refer to the choice between leisure and work theory presented by Schultz and Becker, the human capital theory of which Mincer and Becker are founders, and the family production theory proposed by Mincer. The simplest model in analyzing women's decisions to participate in the labor market dates back to the early 1960s, and specifically to Jacob Mincer's 1962 neoclassical microeconomic model. This model, also known as the leisure-work choice model, is considered one of the earliest attempts to understand the behavior of the female labor force from an economic perspective.

Various factors influence women's participation rate in the economic workforce,

including the level of economic development, education level, and other demographic variables. These factors directly and indirectly influence women's decisions to enter or not enter the labor market. In other words, changes in the level of economic development and demographic shifts can play a fundamental role in determining the extent of women's participation in economic activities (Mahrgan, Rahimzadeh, Shokouhifard, & Al-Imran, 2022).

According to Sharabi, Shdema, Manadreh, and Tannous-Haddad (2025), work centrality reflects the overall importance of work in an individual's life and can be assessed by comparing it with other life domains, such as family, leisure, community, and religion. In the context of women's economic participation in Bamyan, examining work centrality can reveal the extent to which women value economic activity alongside their family and social responsibilities (Sharabi et al., 2025:7).

Despite the efforts made, the 2020 Global Gender Gap Report by the World Economic Forum (WEF) shows that inequalities in this area remain significant worldwide. These gaps are particularly wider in South Asia and the Middle East and North Africa region, reaching about 60 percent. In contrast, North America as well as Eastern and Western European countries are among the regions that have moved closer to equality in economic participation, with the gap estimated between 22 to 31 percent. From an income level perspective, lower-middle-income countries show the highest inequality in economic participation, while the gap in low-income countries is almost on par with high-income and upper-middle-income countries (IMF, 2021:8). Active participation of women in the employment sector and economic activities in various societies has positive effects on the level of social welfare. In societies where women play a more prominent role in the labor market, we will see an improvement in the level of social welfare, especially in various economic sectors. Widespread participation of women in economic activities can lead to a decrease in the fertility rate, an increase in national production, growth in per capita income, and ultimately, an overall improvement in social welfare indicators in society. These developments will not only benefit women but also the entire society, as any improvement in women's economic participation will coincide with increased productivity and efficiency at various economic levels. Conversely, the limitations and inequalities in women's access to economic opportunities are among the most significant factors that can perpetuate poverty and inequality in societies. In such circumstances, addressing phenomena like poverty, unemployment, and economic inequality requires attention and planning to improve conditions

for both genders. Therefore, identifying and strengthening the role and position of women in the process of economic growth and development, especially in economic and social spheres, should be at the center of attention for policymakers and development planners.

Considering that human resources and the level of expertise are considered main pillars in analyzing the factors affecting the economic growth and development of countries, paying attention to women's employment and its impact on the economic growth of countries is an essential and undeniable matter (Alizadeh,2020).

3. Literature review

Women, as one of the important and influential forces in the advancement of human societies, have always been the focus of scholars in the field of development and social policymakers. Successful development experiences show that the active participation of women plays a significant role in the process of societal progress. On the other hand, examining the main factors of underdevelopment in developing countries indicates that one of the most important obstacles to development is the existence of gender inequalities in various legal areas, as well as limitations in women's social participation.

In the research titled “Impacts of labour force of Afghan women based on education in economic growth: in case of Afghanistan”, the role of women's labour force in the economic growth process was examined. The findings obtained from the data analysis indicated that women's participation in the labour market could potentially have positive impacts on macroeconomic indicators; especially since this participation led to a gradual increase in per capita income and an improvement in the level of social welfare. According to Rafiuddin Najam, Harry Anthony Patrinos and Raja Bentaouet Kattan, it is worth noting that severe instability in Afghanistan has led to the formation of a labor market with unique characteristics. Historically, from the 1970s to the present, this situation has shown that successive instabilities have caused widespread disruptions and significantly affected educational and employment opportunities, especially for women. However, macroeconomic analyses related to Afghanistan had shown that the economic growth of this country was primarily influenced by structural factors and economic patterns; among the most important of these factors are the trade balance, trends in exports and imports, the tax and tariff system, agricultural production, industrial development, and the expansion of the services sector.

After 2001, along with political developments in Afghanistan, the situation of women improved relatively in areas such as political participation, education, employment, and access to healthcare services. However, reports from international organizations, including the United Nations, indicate that Afghan women still face significant challenges and inequalities in many development and gender equality indicators compared to men and the global average for women (Congressional Research Service (CRS), 2021). Overall, although the direct impact of the female workforce on Afghanistan's economic growth was reported to be limited statistically, the potential capacity of this group to play an effective role in the country's economic development was considered significant and deemed in need of targeted policymaking (Muhammadi, Dariz, & Ahmadzai, 2023). According to Ganesh and Kohistani (2013), in the past, women who engaged in trade individually began participating in economic activities by forming business groups after 2009. Similar to women's participation in financial and credit institutions, women involved in group trading were able to experience various indicators of progress. These indicators included increased self-confidence, enhanced capabilities, broader mobility, expanded social networks, higher levels of knowledge, a stronger sense of responsibility, participation in decision-making, and improved social and economic status.

Representatives of institutions active in the field of women's rights and economic empowerment have stated that the projects funded by sponsors, in addition to relying on non-participatory and vague planning, tended to focus more on technical and vocational training while largely neglecting marketing support, sales facilitation, and the use of project data.

The main challenges facing women active in the business sector in Afghanistan particularly included conservative attitudes that made women’s participation and economic decision-making difficult without consulting their father or husband. Other challenges included restrictions on physical mobility, the necessity of interacting with non-mahrams, widespread insecurity, and corruption. Additionally, there were other restrictions imposed on women (Ganesh & Kohistani, 2013).

Between November 2012 and March 2013, an extensive study on the literature related to women's economic participation in Afghanistan was conducted, aiming to identify the main factors influencing this participation. According to World Bank census results, increased economic activity among women is associated with the expansion of home-based production, particularly small-scale and domestic manufacturing activities (World Bank Group, 2023). The

results of this study, presented by Butler (2013), show that Afghan women play a very vital role in the process of economic improvement and sustainable development of their country. This group of women is recognized as one of Afghanistan's valuable human resources, utilizing their economic capabilities to advance the country's economic goals.

Gender equality in the workplace can help reduce poverty and boost GDP by increasing job opportunities for women, but globally, women have not yet fully tapped into their economic potential. Specifically, in many countries, the gender gap in the labor market is decreasing, especially with the transfer of women's jobs to the private sector, which contributes to economic growth and development. In Afghanistan as well, an unprecedented number of women have entered the private and formal economic sectors as entrepreneurs, business owners, and employees. Over the past twenty years, women gradually took on active roles in the social, political, and economic spheres of Afghanistan participated at high government levels, including the cabinet. However, their efforts to achieve gender equality were often overlooked. In 2017, the share of women in the Afghan parliament reached over 25%, but their demands in the field of women's rights were not seriously pursued. In the final years of this period, the deterioration of the security situation, the decrease in women's participation in local institutions, and the lack of necessary support for workers were among the major challenges that hindered the progress and effective political presence of women in the country (WCLRF, 2017).

Even in the past two decades, the official contribution of women to the economic development of Afghanistan was minimal. Although women constituted about 47 percent of the country's nearly 34.65 million population, only 26.8 percent of them were part of the workforce, and merely 29 percent of women of working age were actually employed. Among them, most women (about 70 percent) worked in the agricultural sector, and a small number participated in other sectors. The literacy rate among women was also very low; only 19.9 percent of women were literate, while this figure was 49.4 percent among men. Of course, among women under 25, the literacy rate had increased to about 38.7 percent. On the other hand, wage discrimination between women and men was evident; women earned, on average, 30 percent less than men for doing the same jobs (World Bank,2016).

Studies conducted show that the unemployment rate among women in Afghanistan is significantly high (Paikar, 2018). This research examines the structural factors affecting women's economic activities and identifies the challenges facing female workforce participation. Based on

the data from this research, participants, especially in the city of Mazar-e-Sharif, identified insecurity as the most significant factor contributing to their unemployment. In addition, instances of sexual harassment in public spaces and workplaces have also been considered fundamental and widespread problems. The findings of this study have provided a basis for offering recommendations to the Economic and Social Council to strengthen women's rights and enhance their participation in political, economic, social, and educational spheres. Despite these positive developments, the lack of comprehensive information and data regarding these women and their economic activities remains a challenge. This indicates the need for further research on the participation of Afghan women in the labor market (Butler, 2013).

A study conducted by the Asian Foundation in Afghanistan shows that the contribution of active women to economic growth through income-generating activities decreased in 2016 compared to 2015 (Heniea, 2016). Women in Afghanistan have always lived under the heavy shadow of traditions and social and cultural beliefs, and this has profoundly affected their personal and professional lives. Even women who had found employment opportunities in the past were not safe from widespread discrimination and restrictions. Working conditions for employed women have often been unstable and fraught with numerous challenges. According to the research by Ganesh et al. (2013), about 95 percent of working women in Afghanistan were engaged in unstable and informal jobs, and 78 percent of them were involved in unpaid work within the family framework (Ganesh, Kohistani, & Azami, 2013). According to Bossuroy, Ceretti, and Dahmani-Scuitti (2025) however, after the Taliban came to power, restrictions on women's employment have intensified. Among men aged 15 to 29, the unemployment rate has nearly tripled, rising to 22 percent in 2023. For young women, the situation is even worse; currently, almost a quarter of them are unemployed, which represents a sevenfold increase compared to 2020 (Bossuroy, Ceretti, & Dahmani-Scuitti, 2025).

4. Research methodology

To better understand the process of women's economic participation and identify the challenges they face, comprehensive documentary studies were first conducted, followed by a field survey using a mixed quantitative and qualitative method. This research approach allowed us to obtain a comprehensive and realistic picture of the status of women in the field of economic

participation through the review of existing resources and the collection of field data, and to more accurately identify the factors affecting their participation.

For collecting field data, a questionnaire was distributed to 57 entrepreneurial women in the center of Bamyan province and the Bazar of Yakawlang district. The statistical population of this research included economically active women in the mentioned areas, who were purposefully selected to provide an appropriate representation of the economic participation of women in Bamyan. The research sample consisted of 57 entrepreneurial women from whom the relevant data were collected.

After the data collection process was completed, a database was created for recording, organizing, and managing the information. For the analysis of quantitative data, the SPSS statistical software was used, and for the analysis of qualitative data, the content analysis method was employed to ensure a comprehensive and accurate examination of the results.

Ultimately, after the Taliban came to power in August 2021, Afghanistan's economy settled at a lower equilibrium. Over the past two decades, economic growth in the country has been unstable and non-inclusive, accompanied by rising urban poverty and rural livelihoods dependent on fragile agricultural production. This growth trajectory can be divided into three distinct phases:

First - 2004 to 2014**:** Rapid economic growth, largely supported by international aid and a strong military presence, which led to increased demand and the development of infrastructure. Second - Around 2014: Economic growth slowed due to the withdrawal of international forces, reductions in aid, and rising conflict. Third -After August 2021**:** Gross domestic product (GDP) declined by more than a quarter, primarily because of a contraction in sectoral activities (Bossuroy, Ceretti, & Dahmani-Scuitti, 2025).

5. Research objective

The objective of this research is to examine the level of economic participation of women in Bamyan province as one of the key indicators of sustainable development and social justice. In this regard, the present study seeks to identify the factors influencing women's economic participation, analyze and evaluate the income levels of women in this province, particularly in economic activities, and examine the obstacles and challenges they face in their economic

involvement.

Specifically, this research aims to achieve the following objectives:

• Identify the factors affecting the level of economic participation of women in Bamyan province;

• Analyze and evaluate the income levels of women active in the trade sector in this province;

• Examine the obstacles, limitations, and challenges that Bamyan women face in entering the job market and participating economically.

6. Discussion and analysis

Table 1: Types of Women's Economic Activities

	Activities	Number	Percentage	Total
1	Sewing	13	22,81	57
2	Engaged in small handicraft industries	17	29,82	57
3	Hairdressing	9	15,78	57
4	Bakery	8	14,04	57
5	Cattle farming or dairy production	10	17,54	57

Source: Fled survey, 2020.

Based on the results presented in the table above, it is evident that the largest proportion of women's economic activities is concentrated in the handicraft sector, with 17% of the surveyed women engaged in this field. This is followed by tailoring, which accounts for 13%, and livestock farming and dairy production, comprising 10% of the participants. Furthermore, 9% of women are employed in the hairdressing profession, while the smallest proportion 8% is represented by women working in the baking industry.

Overall, the handicraft sector demonstrates the highest level of participation among women, which may be attributed to the relative availability of essential resources and basic facilities, such as dedicated workspaces and necessary tools. Conversely, the lower levels of participation in fields such as tailoring, livestock farming, hairdressing, and baking may be explained by a lack of adequate infrastructure, equipment, and institutional support. Consequently, to enhance women's economic participation across a broader range of sectors, the provision of appropriate facilities and supportive infrastructure is imperative.

Table 2: The Income level

NO	Type of economic activity	Average monthly income (afghanis)	Type of employment	Additional information
1	Crafts and home businesses	11000 afghanis	Full-time and with a marketing approach	The level of women's participation has not been very high, and their activities have been carried out in a non-cooperative manner.
2	Sales and marketing	13000 afghanis	Private / Independent	Most of the sales have been made through in-person visits.
3	Cattle farming or dairy production	7500 afghanis	Self-employment	It is mostly produced in villages and sold in the central Bamyan Bazaar and the Yakawlang Bazaar

Resource: Filed interview, 2020.

Women in the field of handicrafts and home-based businesses earn an average of about 11,000 afghanis per month. These occupations usually include carpet weaving, embroidery, knitting, production of decorative items, and traditional products, which are carried out in the home environment or in the form of small home workshops. The level of participation in this sector is relatively high, as it requires low initial investment, time flexibility, and the possibility of working from home, which has attracted more women to it.

In the sales and marketing sector, women are directly involved in selling various products such as local food, clothing, household items, and handicrafts. The average monthly income of women in this sector reaches about 13,000 afghanis. Activities are mostly conducted in local markets or through mobile sales and in-person visits. In-person sales are particularly prevalent in the central markets of Bamyan and Yakawlang. Activities are mainly conducted privately/independently and outside the framework of cooperatives.

In the livestock and dairy production sector, women work full-time and focus on marketing dairy products such as milk, yogurt, and cheese. However, the average monthly income is only about 7,500 afghanis, which is lower compared to other sectors. This issue can be

attributed to various reasons such as market fluctuations, transportation problems, or the low prices of raw products.

The level of women's participation in this field has not been very high, and activities are carried out in a non-cooperative manner (without membership in cooperatives or support groups), which has led to reduced bargaining power and less access to markets and support resources.

Table 3: The main factors driving women towards passive economic participation

	Significant factors and indicators		Very much	Much	Somewhat	Less	Very less	Total
1	The lack of financial independence for women to invest	Frequency	40	13	1	1	2	57
		Percentage	70.18	22.81	1.75	1.75	3.51	
2	Limitation in access to the necessary money for investment	Frequency	37	15	2	2	1	57
		Percentage	64.91	26.32	3.51	3.51	1.75	
3	Lack of specialized knowledge and appropriate education level	Frequency	33	19	2	2	1	57
		Percentage	57.90	33.33	3.51	3.51	1.75	
4	The government's neglect of comprehensive support for women	Frequency	32	19	3	1	2	57
		Percentage	56.15	33.33	5.26	1.75	3.51	
5	Social and economic structures	Frequency	31	18	4	3	1	57
		Percentage	54.35	31.59	7.05	5.26	1.75	
6	Gender differences in the process of socialization and economic participation	Frequency	29	21	3	3	1	57
		Percentage	50.89	36.84	5.26	5.26	1.75	
7	Women's fear of the dominance of culture and traditional beliefs	Frequency	23	14	3	10	7	57
		Percentage	40.32	24.56	5.26	17.58	12.28	

8	The prevailing culture and customs in society	Frequency	17	19	9	11	1	57
		Percentage	29.82	33.33	15,79	19.31	1.75	
9	Women's lack of interest in economic participation	Frequency	12	10	4	23	8	57
		Percentage	21.05	17.54	7.02	40,35	14.04	

Resource: field survey, 2020.

The findings of Table (2) indicate that, from the respondents' perspective, various factors drive women towards passive participation and consequently limit their presence in economic activities in this province. Among these factors, the lack of financial independence for women to invest has been identified as the most significant deterrent.

Out of the nine variables examined for their impact on women's economic participation, respondents attributed the highest level of impact to this variable. According to the results, 70 percent of respondents chose the option “very high impact”, 22.81 percent chose “high impact”, and 3.41 percent chose “very low impact”. These figures indicate that, in total, more than 92 percent of respondents believe that the lack of financial independence for women is one of the main barriers to their economic participation.

These data indicate that to increase the level of women's economic participation in the province in question, strengthening their financial capabilities and providing opportunities for economic independence should be prioritized in developmental planning.

The second significant factor that has played a role in reducing women's economic participation in this province is the limitation in access to necessary investment capital. The findings obtained from the responses of the participants in the research indicate that this factor has significantly hindered the active participation of women in economic fields. Based on the results, 64.91 percent of respondents chose the option “strongly agree” regarding the impact of this factor and considered it one of the main barriers to women's economic participation. Additionally, 26.32 percent of the other participants also chose the option “Agree,” and thus, in total, more than 91 percent of the respondents believe that the lack of access to financial resources and initial capital is one of the major challenges that prevents investment and active economic participation of women.

In contrast, only 1.75 percent of respondents believed that women did not face any restrictions in accessing the necessary capital, a figure that is very small and indicates a broad consensus regarding the negative impact of this factor on women's economic participation.

These results indicate that any effective policymaking aimed at the economic empowerment of women in this province should focus on facilitating their access to financial resources, providing low-interest loans, creating funds to support women's entrepreneurship, and financial empowerment programs.

Based on the obtained results, factors such as the lack of specialized knowledge and low education levels are considered significant barriers to women's economic participation. These factors have particularly and directly influenced the lack of active participation of women in economic fields. Specifically, 57.90 percent of respondents believed that the lack of specialized knowledge and appropriate education is a major barrier to women's economic participation, and 33.33 percent also spoke about the significant impact of these factors on women's economic limitations. These results indicate a direct correlation between the level of education and professional skills of women and their participation in economic activities, such that the lower the academic and professional qualifications of individuals, the less likely they are to participate in the labor market and economic activities.

The data obtained from the research indicates that the lack of comprehensive and systematic support from the government has been one of the main factors in the decline of women's economic participation in this province. The lack of formulation and implementation of specific and effective support policies, the neglect of women's economic and social needs, and the absence of effective empowerment programs have created a kind of passivity and lack of motivation among women to actively participate in economic activities.

Based on the findings, 56.15 percent of respondents believed that the government's negligence in this area has played a “somewhat significant” role in reducing women's economic participation, and 33.33 percent also assessed this factor as “very effective”. These statistics indicate that institutional support and appropriate policymaking by the government are among the essential prerequisites for enhancing women's economic participation. In the absence of such support, the gender gap in employment and economic activities deepens, and equal opportunities for women become severely limited.

The respondents of this study have identified gender differences in the processes of socialization and economic participation as one of the influential and prominent factors in their analyses. Specifically, 50.89 percent of the participants considered this variable as having a very high impact on socialization processes and economic participation, while another 31 percent evaluated it as having a high impact. These results indicate the significant importance of gender differences in shaping individuals' social and economic patterns and may reflect the profound impacts of social and cultural structures on the opportunities and challenges faced by different gender groups. Therefore, gender differences in socialization processes and economic participation should be considered and examined more closely as one of the key components in social and economic analyses.

In traditional societies such as Afghanistan, deeply rooted structures and cultural beliefs have a significant impact on the level of participation and role of women in various social and economic spheres. In such a context, prevailing traditions not only determine the normative frameworks of individual and collective behaviors but also play a significant role in shaping the opportunities and limitations faced by women.

The findings of this research also support this issue, as the fear of the dominance of traditional culture and conservative beliefs has been identified as one of the main obstacles to women's economic participation in this province. Specifically, 40.32 percent of the respondents considered this variable to be very influential, and 24.56 percent also assessed it as somewhat highly effective.

These data show that traditional culture, especially in areas where traditional values and norms are strongly entrenched, can be a deterrent to the empowerment of women and their active participation in economic development processes. Therefore, any policy aimed at enhancing women's presence in economic and social spheres will require a thorough analysis and conscious intervention in the realm of prevailing beliefs, cultural norms, and social structures.

In the analysis of previous variables, it has been clearly emphasized that culture and the prevailing customs in society play a significant role in determining the level of women's participation in various social, economic, and cultural spheres. Cultural structures and social traditions not only shape the norms and values governing individual and collective behavior but also directly influence the opportunities and limitations of women's participation in development processes.

The findings of this research also confirm this reality. Such that 29.82 percent of the respondents considered the prevailing culture and customs as a “very effective” factor in limiting or facilitating women's participation in various sectors of society, and 32.33 percent of others also assessed this factor as “somewhat important”. These percentages indicate that a significant portion of the research participants acknowledge the high impact of cultural factors in shaping gender roles and the presence of women in society.

Therefore, it can be concluded that in societies with traditional cultural structures, such as the studied community, prevailing culture and customs not only determine the public attitude towards women’s participation but also serve as one of the main obstacles or, in some cases, facilitators of their presence in various fields. This issue underscores the necessity of gradually reforming cultural attitudes and beliefs alongside formulating supportive policies to enhance women’s participation.

Ultimately, the results of this research indicate that although various factors such as traditional beliefs, gender roles, and cultural norms have influenced women’s economic participation, the personal reluctance of women to engage in economic activities has been less significant and prevalent compared to the other examined variables. In other words, a significant portion of the respondents believe that the main factor behind the decline in women's economic participation is due to external and structural barriers, rather than a lack of internal motivation or desire.

Based on the obtained data, 21.05 percent of respondents acknowledged that women generally did not have a tendency to refrain from economic participation, and another 17.54 percent believed that there was only a somewhat significant tendency in this regard. These findings indicate that women in this society, despite a relative inclination towards economic activity, have been compelled to be passive and withdraw from economic spheres in the face of a conservative and restrictive social environment.

As mentioned in previous sections, the dominance of traditions and cultural attitudes in society has created an environment that poses serious challenges to women's economic participation. As a result, the decrease in women's participation in economic spheres is more rooted in prevailing structures and social barriers than in their lack of interest or desire. This makes the need for policy, cultural, and educational interventions to create an equitable participatory environment and empower women even more pressing.

7. Structural challenges of the women's market in Bamyan province

According to the interviewer's observations, one of the fundamental challenges of the women's market in Bamyan province is its unsuitable geographical location. This market is located in a place that makes access difficult for a wide range of customers. In addition, considering the volume of women's production, the physical space of the market is not sufficient for the effective and orderly display of products.

In the aspect of packaging and organizing products, significant deficiencies are also observed. Women producers generally lack the facilities and knowledge necessary for proper packaging and sorting of their products; as a result, the products are presented in an unseparated manner without clear categorization. This situation, while causing confusion for customers, leads to a decrease in service quality and a negative impact on the shopping experience.

From a technical and infrastructural perspective, the aforementioned market is facing a severe lack of facilities. Many of the stalls are equipped with only a small cabinet that lacks the capacity to store and display all the products of the producers. As a result, sellers are forced to stack goods tightly and haphazardly in the limited space, which has diminished the order and aesthetic appeal of the booths and made the professional display of products difficult.

Another important issue is the lack of psychological security and a safe working environment for women active in this marketplace. According to the statements of several women, inappropriate and sometimes humiliating encounters have been reported when men pass by the market. These types of encounters lead to a weakening of the sense of security and a decrease in women's self-confidence in the workplace. Moreover, the physical location of the market, which is surrounded by roads on all sides, in itself is a factor in creating a sense of insecurity and unrest for women.

Additionally, the combination of selling food products with handicrafts in a shared space is another noteworthy issue in this market. This situation not only undermines the specialized identity of the market but also causes functional interference, reduces thematic coherence, and increases customer confusion. This issue has a direct negative impact on the activities of women artisans and the shopping experience of visitors.

Ultimately, the lack of proper sanitary facilities is also considered one of the serious challenges of this market. Women working in this market do not have access to clean drinking

water, and there is only one toilet unit available for all the vendors, which in no way meets their basic sanitary needs.

8. Conclusions

The examination of women's economic participation in Bamyan province from 2010 to 2021 shows that despite the significant presence of women in certain economic activities, this participation has remained at a basic level and has been accompanied by notable limitations. Based on the available data, a significant percentage of women have been engaged in activities such as handicrafts (29.82%), sewing (22.81%), livestock farming and dairy production (17.54%), hairdressing (15.78%), and baking (15.4%). These figures indicate the relative inclination of women to participate in home-based or semi-home-based economic activities, which generally rely on traditional and accessible skills.

However, there have been numerous obstacles to the effective and sustainable participation of women in the economy of this province. One of the fundamental challenges has been the lack of financial independence and access to necessary investment capital, which has severely limited women's ability to start independent businesses. This issue, along with the lack of specialized knowledge, low education levels, and the absence of appropriate technical and vocational training, has prevented women from fully utilizing their potential.

On the other hand, the lack of government support and targeted policies to strengthen women's economic capacity indicates the neglect of formal structures regarding women's role in local development. Traditional socio-economic structures and prevailing cultural beliefs, including gender differences in the socialization process, have led many women to avoid entering economic activities due to fear of social judgment and family pressures, or to operate solely within accepted and closed frameworks.

Moreover, some women have not taken advantage of available opportunities due to internal reasons such as lack of self-confidence, lack of experience, and even disinterest in economic participation. These factors, in total, have led to the formation of a closed and conservative cycle, from which exiting requires comprehensive interventions at cultural, educational, economic, and legal levels.

Overall, women's economic participation in Bamyan from 2010 to 2021, although showing signs of dynamism and presence in some areas, has not been able to transform into a

sustainable and development-oriented trend due to the lack of supportive infrastructure, socio-cultural barriers, and structural problems. Addressing these challenges requires a review of national and local policies, empowering women through education, providing financial resources, and striving to change cultural attitudes towards the role of women in the economy.

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